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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

More about the SOC...

On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

Join us...

As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

Annual membership rates*

Adult (aged 18 and over)	£	36.00
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Junior (aged 17 or under)	£	14.00
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For non-UK addresses, there is a £15.00 supplement to all categories to cover postage.
Rates valid until end of August 2022 (†31 December 2022), subject to change thereafter.

For more information about the Club and its activities, including details of how to join, please visit www.the-soc.org.uk or contact Waterston House on 01875 871 330, or email membership@the-soc.org.uk

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Birding and Science in the SOC - a step change

In March, the SOC Council made a major decision to appoint a full-time Birding and Science Officer. In doing this, we hope we will be able to make a step change in the capacity of the SOC to contribute to birding and ornithology in Scotland.

Plate 86. Ian Bainbridge, WeBS count at Fleet Bay, Dumfries & Galloway, April 2021. © *Carole Bainbridge*

The work already done by the Birding and Science Committee has identified many areas of activity that we are very keen to pursue and which will be greatly enhanced by the contribution of a full-time staff member. In the short term, we want to publish an overview of key knowledge gaps for Scotland's birds, as a means to identify survey and research priorities. In the medium term, we think it will be important for the Scottish birding community to collaborate over the publication of an annual national overview of Scotland's birds. In the long term, we have to look ahead to the SOC's role in any successor to the *2007–2011 Bird Atlas* for Britain and Ireland.

The new post-holder will help to develop, strengthen and support the network of Local Bird Recorders (LBR) across Scotland, organising LBR meetings and helping to maintain the *Online Scottish Bird Report* (OSBR), as well as representing SOC in the BirdTrack partnership. They will also provide advice and support to SOC Branches in relation to developing skills and capacity in bird recording and research, including initiatives to develop and support young birdwatchers.

All told, this is a big job, hopefully challenging and rewarding in equal measure, and by the time you read this we hope we'll be well on the way to making an appointment - an exciting step for the SOC.

Needless to say, a venture such as this is not going to be cheap or cost-free. Council decided to draw on our investments to provide funds for this post, and in the long term we need to redouble our effort to raise the money to keep the show on the road. Your membership support has been absolutely superb throughout the difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic and we are holding membership fees steady for a further year in recognition of this. However, why not persuade your friends and fellow birders to join us as well, and why not consider making a gift to the SOC in your will? All are ways of helping us to meet the challenges facing Scotland's birds and the SOC in the years to come.

Ian Bainbridge, SOC President.

Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland, 2019

C.J. MCINERNY & R.Y. MCGOWAN
on behalf of the Scottish Birds Records Committee

This is the 12th annual report of the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) describing rare birds recorded in Scotland during 2019. Details of previous annual reports that cover the period 2005 to 2018 can be found in McGowan & McInerny (2018) and McInerny & McGowan (2020), some of which are cited in this report.

A summary of the rare bird species considered by SBRC, the SBRC List, and other committees is given in Appendix 2 and is shown at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

Changes to the SBRC List include, from 1 January 2019, White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* being removed from the SBRC List with records from after this date assessed by local Scottish committees. Additionally from this date all records of Western Subalpine Warbler *Curruca iberiae*, Eastern Subalpine Warbler *C. cantillans* and Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni* are considered by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC), with Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* added to the SBRC List being no longer assessed by BBRC.

Furthermore, from 1 January 2020, Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*, Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* and Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* were removed from the SBRC List. Records for Lesser Scaup and Kentish Plover are considered by BBRC and the four other species assessed by local Scottish committees. For a summary of these changes see Appendix 2 and www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

The range and number of most rare birds seen in Scotland during 2019 was similar to other years. However, for two species records were considered by SBRC for the first time, having been previously assessed by BBRC: a record of Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* was accepted with the last from 2005; and the first Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* records were noted since 2012. Elsewhere a significant influx of 49 White-rumped Sandpipers *Calidris fuscicollis* was reported, the highest ever annual total, including 36 on the Outer Hebrides where a group of 11 was observed. Although the species is seen most years, particularly in the Outer Hebrides, the previous highest Scottish annual total was 27 in 2005 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010).

In contrast, a number of SBRC species were not seen in Scotland during 2019 including Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*, Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*, Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* and Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*.

Format of the report

The species accounts in the report follow a standard format following the annual BBRC reports published in *British Birds*. Nomenclature and taxonomic sequence follow the latest version of the *Scottish List*, which follows the 9th Edition of the British List and subsequent changes adopted by

the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU 2018a, BOU 2018b, BOU 2020a, BOU 2020b, BOU 2021, Forrester *et al.* 2019; www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/the-scottish-list).

On the header line, after the species or subspecies name, are three numbers:

- Total number of birds in Scotland to the end of 2004, based on Forrester *et al.* (2007) with adjustments in some cases, and also including records added in this report. In some cases older records, 'At Sea' records, or records pertaining to the breeding population are explicitly excluded from the totals, following the example of Forrester *et al.* (2007). In the case of Marsh Warbler and Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* numbers seen in the past were so great that totals have not been estimated.
- Total number of birds in Scotland during the period since 2004 but excluding the current year.
- Where appropriate, acceptances by BBRC and by local committees are included. Returning birds or repeat sightings of the same individual, insofar as these can be judged, are not counted and so are not added to totals.
- Total number in the current year (2019).

Occasionally, adjustments to totals have been made to take account of late retrospective acceptances by local committees, or when corrections are detected from Excel spreadsheet totals.

Immediately below the header line is a table of accepted Scottish records for 2019, with details. For those species assessed locally in the Northern Isles (Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney), full details of accepted Northern Isles records are not given. Instead, they are summarised as a separate table or in the text.

For all taxa information is also provided about pre-2019 records that were not included in previous reports. These are presented in reverse chronological order. Records assessed by SBRC are listed in full, otherwise only summary information is provided.

It should be noted that records of individual birds reappearing at the same location in subsequent years can be accepted by Local Recorders without submission to SBRC; full details of these returning birds are nonetheless provided in this report. Revised and/or corrected details are also provided for some pre-2018 records, published previously.

For each record listed in full the following information is provided:

- Year
- Recording area www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network
- Location(s). In the case of some recording areas, individual islands or component administrative areas are also named.
- Number of birds if more than one, with age and/or gender if known.
- 'Returning' if applicable.
- Date(s). Note that the use of a date range does not necessarily imply that a bird was confirmed to be present at the location or observed throughout; in some cases, it may have been observed only on the first and last dates and may even have moved elsewhere.
- 'Found dead' or 'died' if applicable.
- 'Trapped' if applicable.
- Use of DNA analysis to aid identification.
- Existence of a photograph, video or audio recording, if this formed part of the assessment process.
- Names of observers, in alphabetical order. Every effort has been made to name only those people who played a part in finding and/or identifying the bird. However, if no submission was made by these observers, the submitter of the record is also credited: if the submitter was the Local Recorder this is shown as '*per* Local Recorder'. All other observers are covered by the use of '*et al.*'.

- Details and location of specimen if preserved in a museum, with specimen accession number if available.
- Additional sightings of the same bird at a different location, or a cross-reference to additional sightings in a different recording area or year. Where a bird is said to be the same, this is usually a presumption based on the judgment of the observer, Local Recorder and/or SBRC.

The table of records is followed by the main text of the species account. At the end of each account, a brief summary of global breeding and wintering distribution, with mention of relevant subspecies to Scotland, is given in parentheses.

Species coverage

Species coverage is changed from the last report, with some species removed from the SBRC list being assessed either by BBRC or local committees, while other species have been added. White-billed Diver, Subalpine Warbler and Arctic Redpoll have been removed, and Lesser Yellowlegs and Arctic Warbler added. The changes occurred from 1 January 2019; however, some older pre-2019 records of these species, where appropriate, are included in this report.

A list of records assessed by SBRC and considered to be 'not proven' can be found in **Appendix 1**. **Appendix 2** summarises the involvement of different committees in the assessment of the taxa on the SBRC List each year for the period 2016–20. **Appendix 3** lists corrections to previous SBRC Reports.

SBRC

SBRC was set up in 1984 as a subcommittee of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) Council. Its role is to assess records of species that are rare in Scotland but not rare enough in Britain to be assessed by BBRC. Current members are Mark Wilkinson (Chairman), Rob Fray (replacing David Parnaby in 2020), Jim Dickson, Mark Lewis, Dave Pullan, David Steel and Mark Warren. Chris McInerny is non-voting Secretary and Bob McGowan is non-voting Museum Consultant. For more information about SBRC see www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/about-sbrc.

Records accepted by SBRC are announced on the SOC website as soon as they are processed at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/recent-decisions, and thereafter formally published in annual reports, such as this, in the June issue of *Scottish Birds*.

When published the accepted record details are also added to Excel spreadsheets which list all records for SBRC species. These Excel spreadsheets display the data chronologically by recording areas, and graphically both by year from 1950 to 2019 and seasonally by 10-day periods. Examples of the graphs have been used in SBRC Reports published in *Scottish Birds*, with some in this report. The Excel spreadsheets have been placed on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-species-analysis, where they can be downloaded; they are updated once a year following publication of the SBRC Report. The SBRC and SOC encourage interested parties to use these Excel files which are a convenient way to analyse and interrogate SBRC data, but we ask that SBRC Reports published in *Scottish Birds*, such as this, are cited as a way to acknowledge the source of the data.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost we are grateful to all observers who submitted records of Scottish rarities to Local Recorders and SBRC during the period. Without their efforts to find and record these birds the report would not exist. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to those who gave permission for their excellent photographs to be reproduced here.

We thank the following Local Recorders for their assistance in compiling, checking and correcting records for this report: Yvonne Benting, Ian Broadbent, Paul Collin, Jon Cook, Jim Dickson, Iain

English, Rob Fray, Sinclair Manson, Russell Neave, David Parkinson, David Parnaby, John Poyner, Fraser Simpson, Graham Sparshott, Stephen Welch, and Val Wilson. We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of the Northern Isles recorders Rob Fray, Russell Neave and David Parnaby in helping to compile summaries for species assessed locally within their areas included in this report. We very much appreciate the help of Stephen Hunter in managing the SBRC pages on the SOC website, uploading accepted SBRC records and the SBRC Excel spreadsheets. We thank Ian Andrews for help with updating the SBRC Excel spreadsheets and preparing the figures for this report, and Keith Naylor and Mark Wilkinson for comments on the manuscript.

Systematic list of accepted records

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
19 (of 23 birds): 53: 2

Table 1. Accepted records of Lesser Scaup in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Borders** Millar's Moss Reservoir & Mire Loch, St Abb's Head, adult, male, 18 May to 10 July, photo (A. Denton, C.R. Hatsell, W. Scott *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 70–71). **Dumfries & Galloway** Loch Ryan, adult, male, 9–30 January, photo; same, returning, Loch Ryan, 28 October to 31 December (B.D. Henderson).

Lesser Scaup is a rare though increasing visitor to Scotland, since the first in 1990, with observations throughout the country. Most records have been of singles, although multiples, including a group of three, have been seen. A number of individuals have remained for extended periods, sometimes moving between sites, and have returned in following years.

Plate 87. Lesser Scaup, male, Millar's Moss Reservoir & Mire Loch, Borders, 18 May to 10 July 2019. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Due to the species becoming rarer in Britain records of Lesser Scaup from 1 January 2020 will be assessed by BBRC, and so this is the last year that it will be listed in SBRC Reports.

The male seen in Borders was the first for the recording area and was unusual both in the length of its stay and that it attempted to mate with a Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, the first observation of such behaviour in Scotland (Wilkinson 2020).

An adult male Lesser Scaup was seen on Loch Ryan in December 2016 (McGowan & McInerny 2018), so it is possible that the 2019 observation is the same returning bird. However, the gap of three years makes this uncertain so the record listed here is counted as a new bird.

(Breeds in North America from Alaska to Ontario and south to California, Colorado and Minnesota. Most migrate to winter from USA south to Central America, the Caribbean and Hawaiian Islands, but smaller numbers regularly move eastwards to winter in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.)

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
34: 9: 2

Table 2. Accepted records of Alpine Swift in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Orkney** Burwick, South Ronaldsay, 8 June (D. Hoy *et al.*). **Shetland** Skaw, Unst, 27 September, photo (D. Cooper).

Alpine Swift is a very rare visitor to Scotland, seen usually between mid-April and late July. Spring occurrences involve overshoots from mountain breeding grounds on the European

continent, while those in summer relate to wandering non-breeders. There are very few autumn records.

The two 2019 observations, in coastal areas on islands, are typical for many sightings in Scotland; 53% of records have been seen under such circumstances.

(Nominate *melba* breeds in north Africa and southern Europe from Iberia to the Middle East, moving to southern Africa in winter. Nine other subspecies in the Indian subcontinent and Africa.)

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
29: 9: 2

Table 3. Accepted records of Stone-curlew in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Outer Hebrides** Nis (Ness), Isle of Lewis, 25 June, photo (G. Gay *et al.*). **Shetland** Virkie & Loch of Clevigarth, Mainland, second-calendar-year or older, 17 May, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*).

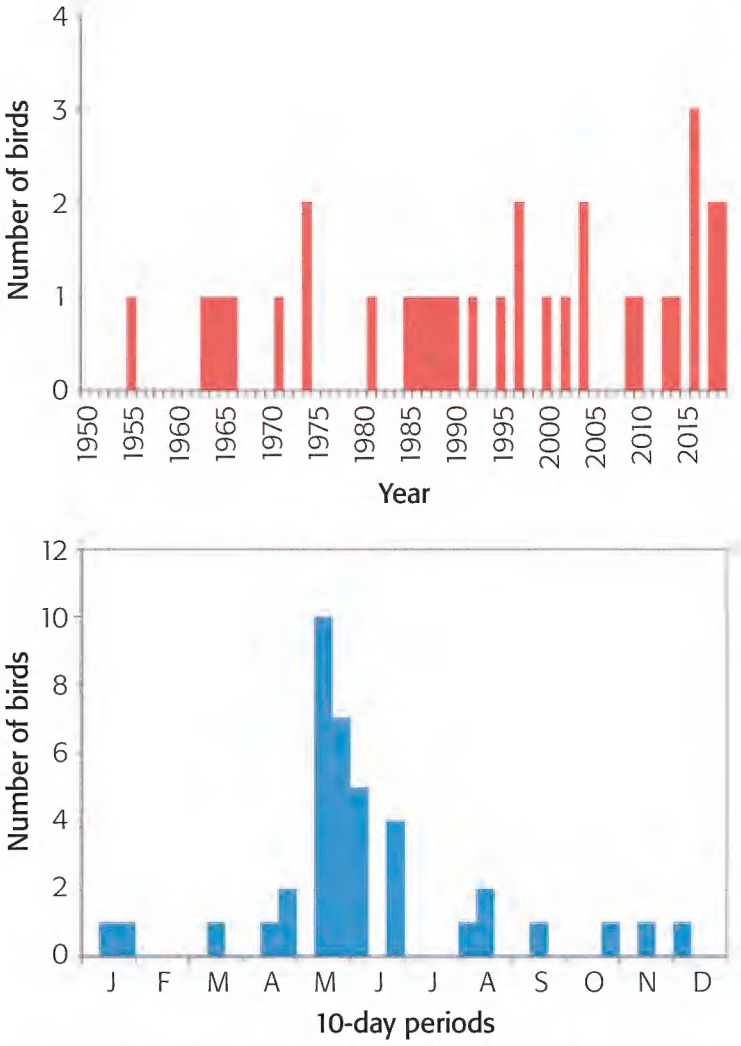

Figure 1. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Stone-curlew in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2019.

Stone-curlew is a very rare visitor to Scotland; there were just 38 observations to the end of 2018 with almost half of these in the Northern Isles, and the remainder scattered across the country though mostly along the east coast. There is a peak in occurrence in late May and early June, although birds have been observed at all times of the year (Figure 1).

The two 2019 observations fit this pattern being seen in May and June, with the Isle of Lewis bird the second for the Outer Hebrides and the Shetland bird the seventh for the recording area.

(Nominate *B. o. oedicnemus* breeds in open habitats in southern Europe east to the Caucasus, extending as far north as England and Poland; migrates south to winter in Spain and North Africa. Five other subspecies.)

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
8 (of 9 birds): 1: 3

Table 4. Accepted records of Black-winged Stilt in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Argyll** Heylipol, Tiree, second-calendar-year, male, 16–18 April, photo (G. Todd *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 262–265; 40: 169–172). **Borders** Greenlaw Farm pond, Foulden, first-calendar-year, 29 August, photo (R. Drew, C. Hartley *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 169–172). **Fair Isle** North Haven, first-calendar-year, 9 October, photo (S. Thomson *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 169–172).

Black-winged Stilt is very rare in Scotland with just nine records of 10 birds, although these were found in many parts of the country including islands. The first was pre-1684, the next two in 1850 and 1920, with two records during the 1950s, two in the 1980s and one each in 1990 and 2012 (Forrester *et al.* 2007, Newell 2012).

These are the first Black-winged Stilt records to be considered by SBRC as the committee has only assessed records of the species since 1 January 2017, these being previously judged by BBRC (Appendix 2).

The Tiree bird was the first to be seen in Scotland since 2012 (Bowler & Todd 2019), though this was followed by the two

Plate 88. Black-winged Stilt, male, second-calendar-year, Heylipol Church, Tiree, Argyll, 16–18 April 2019. © *Jim Dickson*

observations in Borders and on Fair Isle later in the year (Hartley *et al.* 2019).

It is possible that the two later Scottish observations, and others elsewhere in England during 2019, all relate to the same first-calendar-year bird, an age class very rarely seen in Britain. First-calendar-year Black-winged Stilts were seen at North Yorkshire on 28 August, Foulden (Borders) on 29 August, Northumberland on 31 August, Nottinghamshire on 1–7 September, Berkshire from 11 September to 8 October, and Fair Isle on 9 October. As all of the sightings were of the same age class the coincidence of consecutive and non-overlapping dates suggests that one wide-ranging individual may be responsible for all of these records.

Plate 89. Black-winged Stilt, first-calendar-year, Greenlaw Farm, Foulden, Borders, 29 August 2019. Possibly the same bird was seen elsewhere in England and on Fair Isle. © *Dennis Morrison*

(Breeds patchily across southern Europe to northern France and the Netherlands, Africa, and southern Asia. Northern Eurasian populations migrate south in winter, though other populations are mostly resident.)

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
69: 94: 49

Table 5. Accepted records of White-rumped Sandpiper in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Argyll** Sanaigmore, Islay, two, first-calendar-year, 12–13 October, photo (R. Belter *et al. per* Local Recorder). **Ayrshire** Fail Flash, Tarbolton, two, 16–24 October, photo (D. Cree, D. Given, D. Grant *et al.*). **Dumfries & Galloway** Piltanton Burn, Luce Bay, 4 August (J. Grover *et al.*). **Lothian** Aberlady Bay, adult, 2 August, photo (D. Allan, B. & M. Griffin).

North-East Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, two, adult, 17–18 July, photo (S. Broyd & P. Gordon *et al.*).
North-East Scotland Loch of Strathbeg, second-calendar-year or older, 6–10 September, photo (T. Kirkpatrick, S. O'Hara *et al. per* Local Recorder).
North-East Scotland Waulkmill, Ythan, one (two 17–19 October), first-calendar-year, 14–21 October, photo (P. Crockett, M. Webber *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Caolis, Bhatarsaigh (Caolas, Vatersay), adult, 22–23 July, photo (M. Oksien, B.A. Taylor).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, adult, 5–6 September, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Outer Hebrides Barabhas (Barvas) beach, Isle of Lewis, adult, 16–17 September, photo (J. Jones, D. Pointon *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Cill Amhlaidh (Kilaulay) machair & South Ford, South Uist, adult, 17–18 September, photo (A. Hogg, A. Stevenson *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Sgarasta Bheag, Harris, first-calendar-year, 20 September (R.D. Wemyss).
Outer Hebrides Loch a' Ghlinne, Hiort (Glen Bay, Hirta), St Kilda, adult, 21 September, photo (W.T.S. Miles).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird na Machrach (Ardivachar Point), South Uist, 11, first-calendar-year, 12 October to 10 November, photo (A. Stevenson *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Loch Phaibeil (Loch Paible), North Uist, two, first-calendar-year, 13 October, photo (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird na Machrach (Ardivachar Point), South Uist, seven, first-calendar-year, 15 October, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Outer Hebrides Cille Pheadair (Kilpheder), South Uist, two, first-calendar-year, 19 October, photo (S.E. Duffield).
Outer Hebrides Loch Ordais, Isle of Lewis, first-calendar-year, 20 October, photo (T. ap Rheinallt).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Robhanais (Butt of Lewis), Isle of Lewis, first-calendar-year, 22 October, photo (B.A.E. Marr *per* Local Recorder).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, first-calendar-year, 28 October, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Outer Hebrides Baghasdail & Cille Pheadair (Boisdale & Kilpheder), South Uist, first-calendar-year, 31 October, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird na Machrach (Ardivachar Point), South Uist, two, first-calendar-year, 3 November, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Outer Hebrides Rubha Àird a' Mhuile (Rubha Ardvule), South Uist, first-calendar-year, 8 November, photo (J.B. Kemp).
Shetland Eshaness, Mainland, adult, 16 September, photo (R.M. Fray *et al.*).
Shetland Shoadals, Foula, first-calendar-year, 10–19 October, photo (D. & G. Atherton).
Upper Forth Skinflats, first-calendar-year, 29–30 September, photo (A. Blair, S. Wotherspoon *et al.*).

White-rumped Sandpiper is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland from North America, with most observations in late summer and autumn on the Outer Hebrides.

The total of 49 birds in 2019 was the highest annual total seen in Scotland. This included 36 in the Outer Hebrides where a group of 11 was observed, the largest ever. It is striking how regularly this Nearctic species is a trans-Atlantic vagrant, with birds now seen most years in north-west Scotland. Many are

Plate 90. White-rumped Sandpiper, first-calendar-year, Rubha Àird na Machrach (Ardivachar Point), South Uist, Outer Hebrides, 3 November 2019. © *John Kemp*

Plate 91. White-rumped Sandpipers, two, first-calendar-year, Sanaigmore, Islay, Argyll, 12–13 October 2019. © *Ian Brooke*

young birds displaced east during first migration to their South American wintering grounds. White-rumped Sandpipers have a strong easterly component in the first leg of their autumn migration, as shown by the observation that though they breed as far west as northern Alaska almost all migrate south through central and eastern USA with very small numbers seen along the west coast.

(Breeds in North America at high latitudes, migrating to winter in Brazil, Argentina and Chile.)

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
34: 40: 3

Table 6. Accepted records of Lesser Yellowlegs in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Ayrshire** Capringstone Flash, Irvine, 1–3 October, photo (D. Given, D. Grant *et al.*). **Fair Isle** Da Water, second-calendar-year or older, 18–19 May, photo (R. Cope *et al.*); same **Shetland** Scatness, Mainland, 23–29 May, 19–21 June, photo (R. Riddington *et al.*). **Outer Hebrides** Àird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar), South Uist, first-calendar-year, 24 October to 2 November, photo (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).

Lesser Yellowlegs is a very rare visitor to Scotland. The majority of birds are found in late summer and autumn, with smaller numbers in spring, and there are observations in about half of the recording areas.

This is the first year that SBRC has assessed the species. An increase in numbers observed in Britain means that records after 1 January 2019 are no longer considered by BBRC (Appendix 2).

Plate 92. Lesser Yellowlegs, second-calendar-year or older, Da Water, Fair Isle, 18–19 May 2019. © *Deryk Shaw*

Plate 93. Lesser Yellowlegs, first-calendar-year, Aird a' Mhachair (Ardivachar), South Uist, Outer Hebrides 24 October to 2 November 2019. © *Steve Duffield*

Plumage detail confirmed that the same individual first seen on Fair Isle was subsequently present at the south end of Mainland Shetland.

(Breeds in North America at higher latitudes. Migrates to winter in southern USA, south through the Caribbean, Central and South America to Tierra del Fuego.)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
12: 28: 1

Table 7. Accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Clyde** Balgray Reservoir, fourth-calendar-year, returning, 1 January to 6 February, same as 2018, photo (McInerny & McGowan 2020). **Highland** Skye & Lochalsh, Lower Milovaig, Skye, adult, 23 February to 12 March, photo (A. Stables *et al.*); same, Lower Milovaig, Skye, adult, June to 31 December (R. McMillan).

Yellow-legged Gull is very rare in Scotland, although found throughout the country usually in groups of other large white-headed gulls, often Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*. Birds have been found at all times of the year, sometimes remaining for extended periods, with a number of individuals returning to the same locations in consecutive years. However, the species is probably under-recorded being challenging to identify, particularly immatures.

It seems likely that most if not all records of Yellow-legged Gull in Scotland refer to the nominate subspecies *L. m. michahellis*, which has a Mediterranean and south-west European distribution including England (McInerny

2009). However, observers should be aware that one record in Scotland of Yellow-legged Gull of the subspecies *L. m. atlantis* has been accepted by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) and BBRC as the first for Britain (Stoddart & McInerny 2017, BOU 2020a). All potential records of this subspecific taxon, which breeds on the Atlantic Islands of the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, should be sent to BBRC (Appendix 2).

The Skye bird was just the third for Highland and the first for Skye & Lochalsh; the previous two were in June 2002 and June 2008, in Ross & Cromarty and Sutherland, respectively. Its appearance in February fits with other Scottish observations, as arriving with migrating Lesser-blacked Gulls moving from north-west Africa to their breeding grounds in Scotland.

(Nominate *michahellis* breeds mainly from south-west Europe east to the Black Sea, with immatures dispersing widely in winter as far north as Britain and the Baltic. *L. m. atlantis* breeds on the Azores, Madeira and Canaries, wandering south to north-west Africa.)

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
59: 24: 1

Table 8. Accepted record of White-winged Black Tern in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**North-East Scotland** Ythan Estuary, adult, 28 July, photo (P. Crockett *et al.*).

White-winged Black Tern is a rare visitor to Scotland, mostly observed along the east side of the country and on islands between late spring and late autumn.

(Breeds in central and Eastern Palearctic areas, migrating south to winter in Africa, Australasia and the Indian subcontinent.)

White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
194: 337: 0

Table 9. Accepted record of White-billed Diver in Scotland, 2018.

2018:	**Highland** Uig Bay, Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, 20 January, photo (M. Lumb).

White-billed Diver is a scarce though regular visitor to Scotland, with up to 40 being reported each year. Most occur in spring at a number of favoured localities in the Outer Hebrides, Moray & Nairn and North-East Scotland, where birds stop-over to moult into breeding plumage before moving to summer nesting areas in the high Arctic (McInerny & Shaw 2020). In Shetland and Orkney a few wintering individuals return to the same sites in successive years, and a very small number of immature, non-breeding birds have been observed during the summer.

There may be some overlap among Scottish records given the species' longevity and mobility. It seems likely that a few of the spring birds return to use the same sites each year. As it impossible to distinguish these and they are registered as new records SBRC total numbers are probably inflated.

Records of the species since 1 January 2019 are not considered by SBRC but instead by local committees and so will not be listed in SBRC Reports (Appendix 2); here we note one outstanding record from 2018.

(Breeds in Arctic Russia, Alaska and Arctic Canada; winters on the Pacific coasts of Russia and Canada, and along the Atlantic coast of Norway and in the North Atlantic.)

Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
4: 1: 1

Table 10. Accepted record of Wilson's Petrel in Scotland, 2019.

2019:	**Outer Hebrides** off Loch Baghasdail (Lochboisdale), South Uist, 25 August (A. Stevenson).

Wilson's Petrel is a very rare visitor to Scotland with just five accepted records prior to 2019. The first was a bird caught in poultry nets 50 m from the sea on Jura (Argyll) on 1 October 1891 (Evans 1892). The other four, all since 1988, include two off the Outer Hebrides and the others 'At Sea' off Fair Isle, with three in August and one in June (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The last of these was seen off Labost, Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 3 August 2005 (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2010).

Since SBRC took over the assessment of the species in 2006 no claims have been submitted until this 2019 record.

The Outer Hebrides bird was seen from the deck of CalMac MV *Lord of the Isles* ferry about 10 km out from Loch Baghasdail (Lochboisdale) amongst Storm Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* and Manx Shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus,* which were sitting on the water and flushed as the boat passed them.

(Oceanic. Three subspecies, nominate *O. o. oceanicus*, *O. o. exasperates* and *O. o. chilensis*, all widespread across the southern oceans where it is the world's most numerous seabird. Breeds on the Antarctic continent and offshore islands of South America. Trans-equatorial migrants occur in all oceans. The two subspecies *O. o. oceanicus* and *O. o. exasperates* are thought to migrate into the North Atlantic; although either could occur in Western Palearctic waters, Irish and Icelandic specimens have been identified as *O. o. exasperates*.)

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
3: 19: 1

Table 11. Accepted record of Cattle Egret in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Upper Forth** Bolfornought Farm, Stirling, 10–16 October, photo (W. Callion *et al. per* Local Recorder).

Cattle Egret remains very rare in Scotland although in recent years more are being found. This follows the large increase in numbers present in England, where over 200 appeared in 2007, with the species first breeding in 2008; a second influx occurred in 2016 resulting in further breeding and flocks of 51 and 87 observed in Devon and Somerset during 2018 (McInerny & McGowan 2019).

The only Scottish record during 2019 in Upper Forth was reported to be present at Bolfornought Farm for 2–3 weeks before it was confirmed on 10 October. It frequented a herd of cows, sometimes present with them in their barn.

(Occurs widely in sub-tropical and temperate areas throughout the world, the European population being centred on the Mediterranean, extending north to central and western France, with increasing numbers of records farther north. Largely a short-distance migrant.)

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
22: 5: 2

Table 12. Accepted records of Purple Heron in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Dumfries & Galloway** Lochrutton Loch, first-calendar-year, 7 September, photo (K. & A. Freemantle).
Outer Hebrides Buaile nam Bodach (Balnabodach), Barra, 16–26 May, 9–10 June, photo (the late K. Lyon *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 268–270).

Purple Heron is a very rare visitor to Scotland with a peak of sightings in May and June likely being spring overshoots from continental Europe, and the majority of the remainder occurring in September and October being dispersing juveniles.

The Barra bird remained for over three weeks, the longest staying individual ever seen in Scotland (Lyon 2019). So it was unfortunate that it was at such an inconvenient location for most birders as many have not seen the species in Scotland and would have appreciated adding it to their Scottish List.

(Breeds from Western Europe across to south-east Asia, and also in sub-Saharan Africa, where Western Palearctic populations winter. These populations belong to the nominate subspecies *purpurea*, with three other subspecies breeding in the Cape Verde Islands, Madagascar and the eastern part of the range.)

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
19: 34: 2

Table 13. Accepted records of Black Kite in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Fair Isle** Ward Hill, 19 April, photo (R. Cope *et al.*); same **Shetland** Norwick, Unst, 20 April, photo (D. Cooper); same **Shetland**

Cunningsburgh & Sumburgh, Mainland, 22 April (R.M. Fray, P.A. Harris); same **Fair Isle** Schoolhouse & various locations, 28 April to 1 May, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Orkney North Dales, Stenness, Mainland, 20 April, photo (J.B. Ribbands, E.J. Williams).

Black Kite is a very rare visitor to Scotland from continental Europe. Most have been seen in spring, from April to June, with far fewer sightings in summer and autumn. There have also been instances of summering, and a single case of hybridisation with Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. Occurrences have increased in recent years; there were 33 during 2007–18 following just nine in the period 1997–2006.

This species has been seen a number of times in the Northern Isles, with individuals wandering between the islands. The advent of digital photography has allowed birds to be recorded and re-identified at different sites.

(Nominate *migrans* breeds throughout most of Europe except the far north; winters in sub-Saharan Africa. Other subspecies elsewhere in the Old World.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*
86: 30: 2

Table 14. Accepted records of Woodchat Shrike in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Orkney** Hatston Industrial Estate, Kirkwall, Mainland, second-calendar-year or older, female, 17–18 May, photo (D. Shearer *et al.*).
Orkney Holland House, Papa Westray, first-calendar-year, 10 September, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).

Woodchat Shrike is a rare, almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland, with most in the Northern Isles. Adults and sub-adults are seen in spring as overshoots from their European continental breeding areas, with dispersing juveniles recorded in autumn.

(Nominate *L. s. senator* breeds from north-west Africa, Iberia, France and Belgium south to Turkey; *L. s. badius* on Mediterranean islands; and another subspecies from Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
68 (1950–2004): 29: 1

Table 15. Accepted record of Woodlark in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Fair Isle** Hoiligoini, 29 October (R. Cope *et al.*).

Woodlark is rare in Scotland, found mostly in late autumn and early winter in the Northern Isles. There has been one instance of attempted breeding in Angus & Dundee during 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Since 1950 the majority of observations have been on the Northern Isles, with 70% on Fair Isle and Shetland.

(Two subspecies. *L. a. arborea* breeds in north and central European areas from western Russia through Finland and Norway to England, where present north to Yorkshire. The other subspecies breeds from Iran and the Middle East through southern Europe to north-west Africa. Most populations move south to wintering areas, with more northerly populations moving the farthest.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
286: 99: 5

Short-toed Lark is found annually in Scotland in very small numbers, mostly in spring and autumn, with the majority of observations in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally. It is very rare elsewhere, particularly on the mainland.

In 2019 none were seen on Mainland Scotland or the Western Isles, with just five recorded in the Northern Isles.

Table 16. Accepted records of Short-toed Lark in the Northern Isles, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	-	-	-
Orkney	1	-	29–30 May	-
Shetland	1	3	27–28 Apr	23 Sep–11 Oct

(Eight subspecies, with the subspecies seen in Scotland and the UK undetermined. Breeds widely in dry sandy areas from southern and eastern Europe to the Middle East and western China, with populations migrating to winter in Africa, the Middle East and India.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
40: 52: 2

Table 17. Accepted records of Red-rumped Swallow in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Fair Isle** Malcolm's Head & South Harbour, 21 May, photo (C. Dodd *et al.*).
Shetland Sumburgh, Mainland, 20 May, photo (G.F. Bell *et al.*).

Red-rumped Swallow is observed in Scotland annually in very small numbers from April through to November, mainly along the east coast and on islands. An increase in frequency over the last 15 years is thought to reflect a northward expansion of the European continental breeding range. Over 70% of sightings in Scotland have occurred since 2000.

Two individuals of an eastern subspecies, either *C. d. daurica* or *C. d. japonica*, have been observed in Scotland: one on Orkney and then Skye, Skye & Lochalsh, Highland, in June 2011 (McGowan *et al.* 2013), and the other 'At Sea' c.50 km east of Lybster, Caithness in May 2018 (McInerny & McGowan 2020).

(Eight subspecies. Breeds widely from southern Europe eastwards across the Palearctic region, and in sub-Saharan Africa. *C. d. rufula* breeds in Europe and the Middle East, with nominate *daurica* and *japonica* in Asia. Northern populations are migratory wintering in Africa and southern Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
46: 28: 2

Table 18. Accepted records of Radde's Warbler in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Fair Isle** Klinger's Geo, 17–18 October, photo, DNA analysis (R. Hughes *et al.*).
Isle of May 21–23 October, trapped, photo (M. Marquiss, D. Steel *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 353–355).

Radde's Warbler is a rare late autumn visitor to Scotland, with the majority of occurrences in the Northern Isles, principally Shetland, and the remaining few along the east coast.

The Fair Isle bird was well observed, though it was not heard to call, and showed some features suggesting that it might have been the very similar Yellow-streaked Warbler *Phylloscopus armandii*, an Eastern Palearctic species not previously recorded in the Western Palearctic. Consequently some faecal matter was obtained and DNA analysis performed, which confirmed the bird's identity as a Radde's Warbler.

(Breeds from southern Siberia east to Sakhalin and North Korea; migrates to winter in southern China and south-east Asia.)

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
60: 61: 3

Dusky Warbler is a rare annual visitor to Scotland, with the autumn migration period accounting for all but two sightings. It occurs mainly in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally. Nearly all other sightings have been along the east coast of mainland Scotland.

The three occurrences in 2019 were all in the Northern Isles on typical dates: one at Haroldswick, Unst, Shetland on 2–4 October; one at Millfield, Burray, Orkney on 4 October; and the last at Shirva & Meadow Burn, Fair Isle on 14 October.

(Breeds from western Siberia to China, wintering from the Himalayas to south China; two subspecies, with European vagrants belonging to nominate *P. f. fuscatus*.)

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
157: 116: 7

Table 19. Accepted record of Greenish Warbler in Scotland, 2019, and additional record from 2018. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 20.

2019: **North-East Scotland** Torry Battery, Girdle Ness, 10 September, photo (M. Lewis).
2018: **North-East Scotland** Rattray Head, second-calendar-year or older, 31 May to 1 June, photo (T. Kirkpatrick *et al.*).

Greenish Warbler is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular over the past few decades (Figure 2). It is mostly seen in late

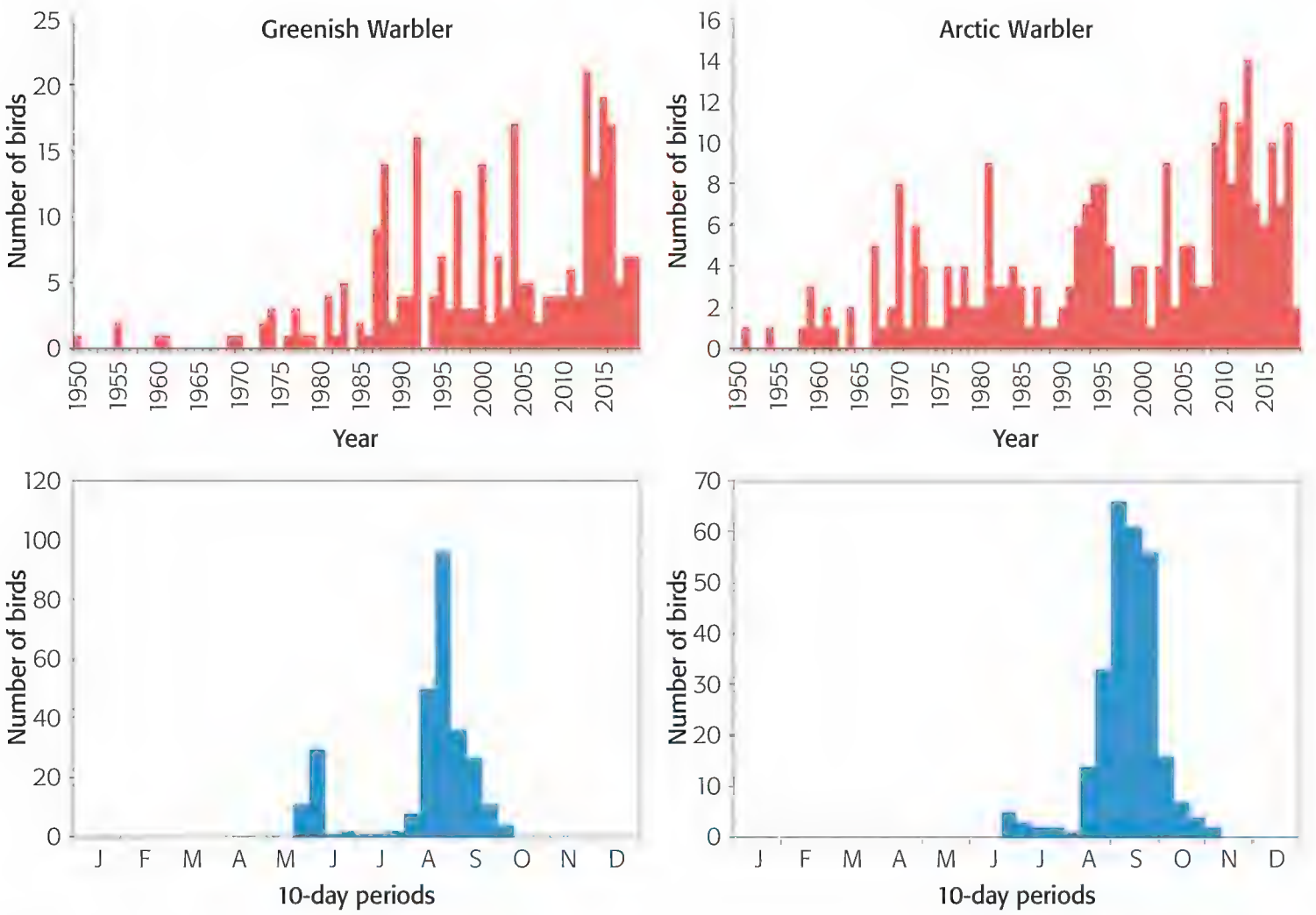

Figure 2. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Greenish Warbler and Arctic Warbler in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2019.

August and early September, with smaller numbers in late May and early June; about 70% of sightings have been in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally.

Table 20. Accepted records of Greenish Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	1	-	27 Aug
Orkney	-	1	-	26 Aug
Shetland	-	4	-	1 Aug–3 Oct

(Four subspecies. *P. t. viridanus* breeds from the Baltic east through Russia to central Siberia and north-west China, wintering in the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. Other subspecies breed in central and eastern Palearctic areas, wintering in southern India and northern Indochina.)

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
164: 112: 2

Table 21. Accepted records of Arctic Warbler in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Isle of May** first-calendar-year, 22–23 September, trapped, photo (I. Livingstone, T. Southall *et al.*).
Shetland Braidfit, Foula, second-calendar-year or older, 12 July, photo (G. Atherton); same **Fair Isle**, Observatory, 13–16 July, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Arctic Warbler is a rare but annual and increasingly regular autumn migrant to Scotland occurring mostly in the Northern Isles and along the east coast (Figure 2). It is most frequent in September, with fewer seen in late August and October; very small numbers are seen in late June and July; about 90% of observations have been in the Northern Isles.

This is the first year that SBRC has assessed the species. An increase in numbers observed in Britain means that records after 1 January 2019 are not considered by BBRC (Appendix 2).

Photographs of plumage detail confirmed that the same Shetland individual was first present on Foula and the following few days on Fair Isle. Such 'island-hopping' of rare warblers has been observed before in Scotland.

Plate 94. Arctic Warbler, second-calendar-year or older, Observatory, Fair Isle, 13–16 July 2019. This same bird was seen on 12 July 2019 at Braidfit, Foula, Shetland. © *David Parnaby*

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to the Bering Straits and west Alaska, and south to the Ural Mountains, Mongolia and Korea. Winters from Myanmar to Indonesia and the Philippines.)

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
46: 135: 15

Table 22. Accepted records of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Scotland, 2019. Records for Fair Isle and Shetland are summarised in Table 23.

2019: **Clyde** High Wards Farm, Gartocharn, male, singing, 4 June, audio recording (R. Coleman, A.A. Murray, V. Wilson *et al.*).
Isle of May first-calendar-year, 18 October, trapped, photo (W. Hayward *et al.*).
Lothian Barns Ness, 8–9 October, photo, audio recording (I.J. Andrews *et al.*).
North-East Scotland Kirkton, Collieston, second-calendar-year or older, 6 June, photo (P. Crockett *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Baile Raghnaill (Balranald), North Uist, male, singing, 21 June, photo, audio recording (S.E. Duffield *et al.*).
Outer Hebrides Bruairnis (Bruernish), Barra, first-calendar-year, 24–27 September, photo (S. Meek, I.N. Ricketts, B.A. Taylor *et al.*).

Blyth's Reed Warbler is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly seen since 2000. Although the first Scottish record dates from 1910, 70% of occurrences have been in the last decade. The increasing frequency of the species in Scotland follows a westward spread from European Russia through southern Finland, Estonia and Latvia, with breeding also noted in Sweden and Poland.

A significant increase in numbers seen in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC and instead has been reviewed by SBRC since 1 January 2015. This trend has continued in Scotland and so since 1 January 2017 the species has been assessed by local committees on Shetland and Fair Isle, and from 1 January 2020 will no longer be considered by SBRC (Appendix 2). So, this is the last year that the species will be listed in an SBRC Report.

The overwhelming majority of sightings (87%) have been in the Northern Isles. While most occurrences are in September and October there have been an increasing number of spring singing males over the last several years, both on islands and mainland.

Table 23. Accepted records of Blyth's Reed Warbler in Fair Isle and Shetland, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	1	5 Jun	18–21 Aug
Shetland	2	5	23 May–6 Jul	17 Aug–26 Oct

Three of the spring records in Clyde, Outer Hebrides and Shetland were singing males, with audio recordings of the songs included with the submitted descriptions; the description of the autumn Lothian record also had an audio recording. Such recordings aided the assessment process of this sometimes difficult to identify species, and SBRC encourages observers to make audio recordings of songs and calls when possible to submit with their descriptions. An article describing how to make audio-recordings and sonograms of bird calls is currently being prepared by Mark Lewis on behalf of SBRC; this will be published in a future issue of *Scottish Birds*.

(Breeds from Sweden, Finland and Baltic countries, through Russia to Lake Baikal and Mongolia, and south to Iran and north Pakistan; migrates to winter in the Indian subcontinent and Myanmar. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
many: *c.* 447: 20

Table 24. Accepted record of Marsh Warbler in Scotland, 2019. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 25.

2019: **Isle of May** 5 June, trapped, photo (S. Ritchie, D. Steel *et al.*).

Marsh Warbler is a scarce annual migrant to Scotland with most occurrences involving singing males in late spring; very rarely birds remain to breed. The Northern Isles account for the overwhelming majority of records, and these are assessed locally.

Table 25. Accepted records of Marsh Warbler in the Northern Isles, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	2	-	29 Jul–1 Sep
Orkney	1	3	7 Jun	9 Jul–20 Sep
Shetland	11	2	20 May–20 Jun	8 Jul–9 Sep

Due to an increase in numbers being observed in Scotland records of the species after 1 January 2020 will no longer be considered by SBRC, so this is the last SBRC Report where it is listed (Appendix 2).

Plate 95. Melodious Warbler, second-calendar-year or older, Lower Stonybreck, Fair Isle, 4–8 June 2019. © *Max Hellicar*

The fluctuating spring annual abundance of this species is related to the prevalence of easterly winds in late May and early June, which are presumed to cause birds to overshoot their breeding grounds in Fennoscandia during northerly spring migration from Africa (Forrester *et al.* 2007).

A notable occurrence was an adult trapped on 7 June at Lighthouse Punds, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, which bore a Swedish ring, this being the first Swedish recovery in the UK. Two males were present at Baltasound, Unst, Shetland from 9 June to 7 July.

(Breeds in Britain, France, Denmark and Fennoscandia east through Europe to Russia; winters in sub-Saharan East Africa.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
53: 19: 4

Table 26. Accepted records of Melodious Warbler in Scotland, 2019, and an additional record for 2014.

2019: **Fair Isle** Lower Stonybreck & Plantation, second-calendar-year or older, 4–8 June, trapped, photo (N. Riddiford *et al.*).
Isle of May second-calendar-year or older, 30–31 July, trapped, photo (S. Langlois *et al.*).
Orkney Twingness, North Ronaldsay, first-calendar-year, 25–26 August, trapped, photo (S.J. Davies *et al.*).
Shetland Out Skerries, 25–29 September, photo (N.W. Addey, D. Bywater, M. McNaghten, S. Wignill *et al.*).
2014: **Outer Hebrides** Gleann (Glen), Barra, 22–29 September, photo (M. Marshall *et al.*).

Melodious Warbler is a very rare spring and autumn migrant to Scotland recorded in most years but not all. About three quarters of occurrences have been in the Northern Isles.

The sighting on Barra was the sixth for Outer Hebrides; four earlier occurrences were on South Uist with another on Barra on 1 October 2003.

(Breeds in north Africa, Iberia, France, Belgium, and south-west Germany to the north-west Balkans; migrates to winter in sub-Saharan West Africa.)

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*
139: 33: 3

Nightingale is a rare, but almost annual, passage migrant to Scotland; spring observations predominate. In the Northern Isles claims are assessed locally and Fair Isle and Shetland account for the vast majority of sightings.

All three sightings during 2019 were in Shetland with birds at Burrafirth, Unst on 15 May, Quendale, Mainland on 11 June and Geosetter, Mainland on 25–27 September.

The last Scottish mainland occurrence of Nightingale was at Garthdee, North-East Scotland on 7 May 2007.

(Nominate *L. m. megarhynchos* breeds from Morocco and western Europe through North Africa and southern and central Europe to the Ukraine and Turkey; *L. m. golzii* breeds from the Aral Sea to Mongolia (one record in Scotland, and another two in England); and another subspecies from the Caucasus area and eastern Turkey to Iran. Winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
15: 59: 15

Table 27. Accepted records of Red-flanked Bluetail in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Fair Isle** Wester Lother, first-calendar-year/female, 23 September, photo (T. Gale *et al.*).
Fair Isle Wester Lother, first-calendar-year/female, 6 October, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).
Fair Isle Observatory, first-calendar-year, 14 October, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Fair Isle South Raeva, first-calendar-year/female, 14 October, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Fair Isle North Gunnawark, first-calendar-year/female, 15 October, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).
Isle of May first-calendar-year, 4–6 October, trapped, photo (A. Lauder *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 353–355; 40: 152–153).
North-East Scotland Rattray Head, 6 October (M.A. Sullivan, M.J. Sullivan).
Orkney Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 24 May, trapped, photo (P.E. Hales, C.D. Scott *et al.*) (*Scottish Birds* 39: 274–277).
Orkney Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 24 September (G. Gay *et al.*).
Orkney Neuks, Sanday, first-calendar-year/female, 5 October, photo (I. Hartley *et al.*).
Orkney Queenamidda, Rendall, Mainland, first-calendar-year/female, 14 October, trapped, photo (J.B. Ribbands *et al.*).
Shetland Burrafirth, Unst, 12 April, photo (R.J. Brookes *et al.*).
Shetland Da Sneck o da Smaalie, Foula, first-calendar-year/female, 24–27 September, photo (M.J. McKee, C. Turner *et al.*).
Shetland Norwick, Unst, 1–3 October, photo, died (P.H. Aley, P. Kemp *per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Sound, Lerwick, Mainland, 21 October, photo (J.G. Brown *et al.*).

Plate 96. Red-flanked Bluetails, first-calendar-year/females, both Fair Isle; North Gunnawark, 15 October 2019; inset, South Raeva, 14 October 2019. The arrows highlight plumage differences which indicate two individuals. © *Steve Arlow and Rob Hughes*

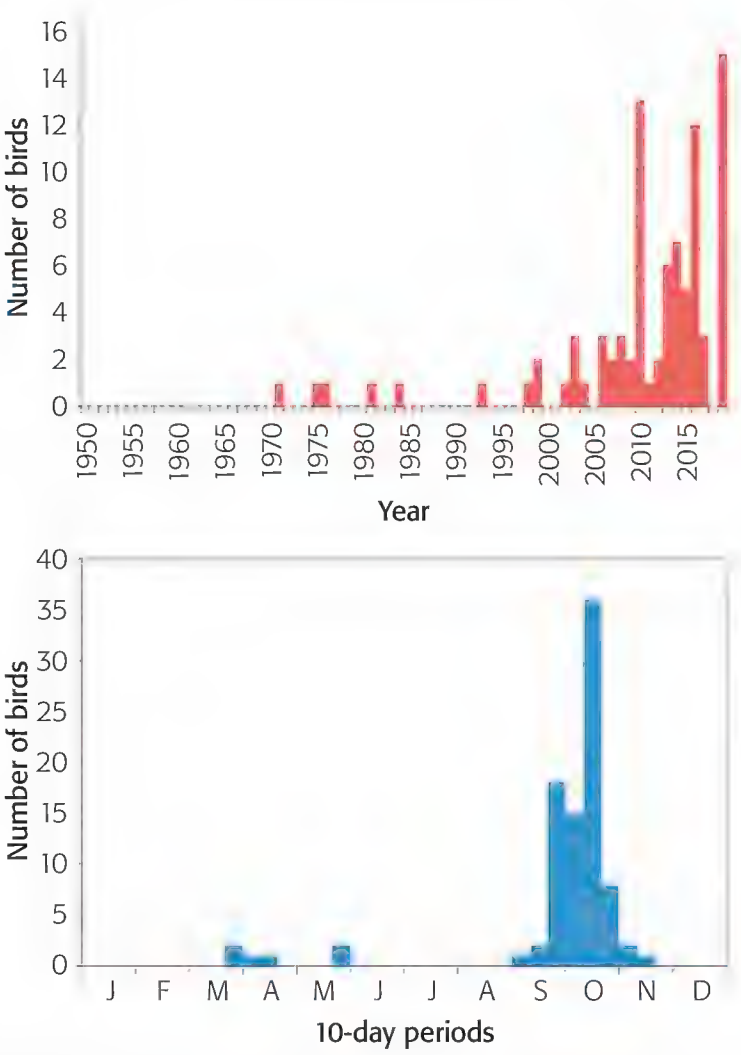

Figure 3. Annual and seasonal occurrence of Red-flanked Bluetail in Scotland by 10-day periods, 1950–2019.

Red-flanked Bluetail is a rare but annual migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular in the last two decades (Figure 3). The vast majority (93%) of sightings in Scotland have been from September to mid-November with a peak in mid-October, and 82% have been in the Northern Isles.

Assessment of Red-flanked Bluetail was undertaken by BBRC until 1 January 2017. A recent increase in numbers seen in Britain means that the species no longer meets criteria for consideration by BBRC and it is now assessed by SBRC (Appendix 2).

Following the surprising blank year for the species in 2018, the 2019 total of 15 was the highest ever Scottish count (Figure 3). Thirteen of these were in autumn from late September to late October (Steel 2019, Steel 2020), with just two in spring in April and May (Scott & Hales 2019).

The sightings on the Isle of May and in North-East Scotland were the second for these areas.

(Breeds in Finland through Eurasia to Kamchatka and south to Mongolia, China and Japan. Migrates to winter in China and south-east Asia. In recent years its range has expanded into more northern and western European areas.)

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
105: 94: 9

Table 28. Accepted records of Citrine Wagtail in Scotland, 2019.

2019: **Fair Isle** Walli Burn & Easter Lother Water, male, 14 May, photo (A. Barker, A. Heavisides, I.R Poxton *et al.*).
Fair Isle Da Water, male, 27–28 June, photo (S. Parnaby *et al.*).
Fair Isle Various locations, first-calendar-year, 25–27 August, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).
Orkney North Wick, Papa Westray, first-calendar-year, 6–17 September, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
Shetland Dale of Walls, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 27 August, photo (R. Riddington, R.M. Tallack).
Shetland Balta Isle, Unst, first-calendar-year, 29 August, photo (B.H. Thomason *per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Hillswick, Mainland, first-calendar-year, 2 September, photo (R.M. Fray *et al.*).
Shetland Baltasound, Unst, first-calendar-year, 3–4 September, photo (B.H. Thomason *et al. per* Local Recorder).
Shetland Shoadals, Foula, first-calendar-year, 15–28 September, photo (D. & G. Atherton *et al.*).

Citrine Wagtail is a rare but annual spring and autumn migrant to Scotland, increasingly regular since the 1990s, though found mostly on islands. Occurrence is generally in autumn with few seen in spring. The overwhelming majority (86%) have been in the Northern Isles with a further 7% in Outer Hebrides. Despite the recent increase in numbers Citrine Wagtail remains an extreme rarity in other parts of the country not being seen in many recording areas.

(Nominate *M. c. citreola* breeds in Russia from Kola Peninsula to River Khatanga, south to Himalayas; another subspecies in Iran and Afghanistan. Migrates to winter in China, south-east Asia, the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Gulf.)

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
151: 207: 19

Table 29. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit in Scotland, 2019. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 30.

2019: **Angus & Dundee** Mains of Usan, 6 October, photo (K. Edwards, G. Smith).
Highland Tarbat Ness, Ross & Cromarty, 5 November, photo (P. Stronach, B. Swann) (*Scottish Birds* 40: 154–156).
Isle of May 5 November (M. Newell *et al.*).

Plate 97. Citrine Wagtail, male, Walli Burn & Easter Lother Water, Fair Isle, 14 May 2019. © *Richard Cope*

Olive-backed Pipit is a rare but regular autumn migrant in Scotland. There was a marked increase in occurrences in Britain and Europe since the 1980s. The species has been considered by SBRC since 2013 and assessed locally in the Northern Isles since 2015, but records of the species after 1 January 2020 will not be considered by SBRC so this is the last SBRC Report where it will be listed (Appendix 2).

Table 30. Accepted records of Olive-backed Pipit in the Northern Isles, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	-	2	-	16–18 Oct
Orkney	-	1	-	28 Aug–6 Oct
Shetland	-	13	-	24 Sep–19 Oct

The two mainland sightings, at Mains of Usan (Angus & Dundee) and Tarbat Ness (Highland), were the first for these recording areas (Stronach 2019).

Of the total number of occurrences in Scotland, 50% have been on Shetland.

Plate 98. Serin, male, Nasg (Nask), Barra, Outer Hebrides, 29–30 April 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

Thus the two in 2019 and one in 2018 perhaps suggest an upward turn for the species incidence in Scotland. It will be interesting to see if this trend continues in the future.

(*A. h. yunnanensis* breeds from Urals east to Kamchatka, Manchuria and northern Japan; one other subspecies breeding from the Himalayas to central Japan. Winters in south-east Asia.)

Serin *Serinus serinus*
7: 3: 2

Table 31. Accepted records of Serin in Scotland, 2019, and additional record from 2018.

2019: **Outer Hebrides** Nasg (Nask), Barra, adult, male, 29–30 April, photo, audio recording (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).
Shetland Brough, Whalsay, female, 26–27 April, photo (J.L. Irvine *et al.*).
2018: **Fair Isle** North Light area, female, 16 May, photo (R. Cope *et al.*).

Serin is an extremely rare vagrant to Scotland, with just nine previous records: three on Fair Isle, two on Shetland (Unst and Fetlar), and one each in Lothian (Edinburgh), Borders (St Abbs), the Isle of May and the Outer Hebrides (McGowan & McInerny 2016). Five were males and four females, with birds being found in April (2), May (5), August (1) and November (1); the last was in 2014.

(Breeds from the Canary Islands, North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula to Germany, Denmark and the Middle East. Northern populations migrate south, remaining within the breeding range.)

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
many: 62: 6

Table 32. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in Scotland, 2019. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 33.

2019: **Caithness** Biel of Duncansby, first-calendar-year, 28 September (R. Hughes & N. O'Hanlon).
Dumfries & Galloway Mull of Galloway, adult, female, 26 May, photo (M. Lazar *et al.*).

Ortolan Bunting is a rare and declining, but still annual, passage migrant to Scotland. In recent years the Northern Isles, where records are assessed locally, have accounted for more than 90% of occurrences. The general trend of decreasing numbers over the last two decades appears to be continuing. This reflects the steep decline of the west European population since 1980 thought to be due to habitat destruction and unsustainable hunting (McInerny & McGowan 2019).

Plate 99. Ortolan Bunting, female, Mull of Galloway, Dumfries & Galloway, 26 May 2019. © *Milo Lazar*

Table 33. Accepted records of Ortolan Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	-	15 May	-
Orkney	-	-	-	-
Shetland	-	3	-	22 Sep–12 Oct

The species remains rare on the mainland with most seen along the east coast: the 2019 records were the seventh for Fife, and the 10th for North-East Scotland. It is extremely rare on west mainland Scotland as shown by the Gryfe Reservoir sighting being for the first for the Clyde recording area.

(Breeds patchily from Algeria and Iberia north to Norway and east through Europe to Asia; winters in sub-Saharan Africa.)

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*
593: 460: 37

Table 34. Accepted records of Little Bunting in Scotland, 2019. Northern Isles records are summarised separately in Table 35.

2019: **Fife** Kilminning, 23 September, photo (B. Farquharson *per* Local Recorder).
Clyde Gryfe Reservoir No. 1, near Garvock, 19 November, photo (B. Beer, A. Russell *per* Local Recorder).
Isle of May 28 September, photo (A. Lauder, K. Morton, J. Osborne *et al.*).
North-East Scotland Inverbervie, 14 October, trapped, photo (P.A.A. Baxter).
Outer Hebrides Eòlaigearraidh (Eoligarry), Barra, 6–7 May, photo (B.A. Taylor *et al.*).

Little Bunting is a scarce but increasingly regular passage migrant to Scotland, mostly in the Northern Isles where records are assessed locally. The great majority are found in autumn but there have also been a few in winter and spring.

Table 35. Accepted records of Little Bunting in the Northern Isles, 2019.

	Number of birds		Date range	
	Spr.	Aut.	Spr.	Aut.
Fair Isle	1	5	23 Apr	8 Sep–2 Oct
Orkney	-	2	-	10 Sep–5 Oct
Shetland	1	23	23 May	22 Sep–17 Nov

Most records were of single birds but two were seen at Swinister Burn, Mainland, Shetland, on 23–27 September.

Plate 100. Little Bunting, Eòlaigearraidh (Eoligarry), Barra, Outer Hebrides, 6–7 May 2019. © *Bruce Taylor*

An additional record from 2018 at Senness, North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 11 October, is added to the header totals.

Due to an increase in numbers being observed in Scotland records of the species after 1 January 2020 will no longer be considered by SBRC, so this is the last SBRC Report where it will be listed (Appendix 2).

(Breeds from northern Fennoscandia to eastern Siberia; winters from north-east India and Nepal to south-east Asia.)

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Appendix 1

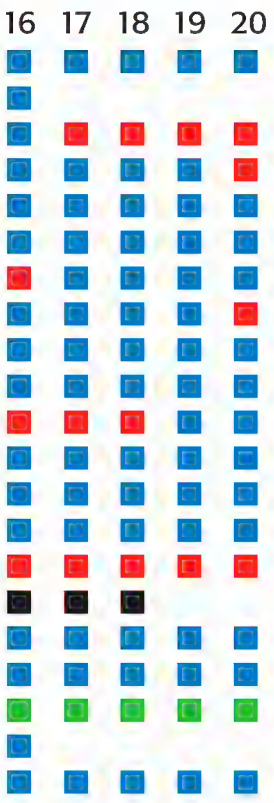
List of records regarded as not proven by SBRC.

2019: **Lesser Scaup** Loch Bea, Sanday, Orkney, 9–21 April; **White-rumped Sandpiper** Skateraw, Lothian, 4 August; **Caspian Gull** Ravensheugh Sands, Scoughall, Lothian, 27 March; **Yellow-legged Gull** Ham, Foula, Shetland, 24 May to 22 June; **Yellow-legged Gull** Garnock Floods, Ayrshire, 23–25 May; **Cory's Shearwater** Barns Ness, Lothian, 18 September; **Cetti's Warbler** Crantit Trail, St Ola, Kirkwall, Mainland, Orkney, 9 May; **Marsh Warbler** Inverugie, North-East Scotland, 13 May.

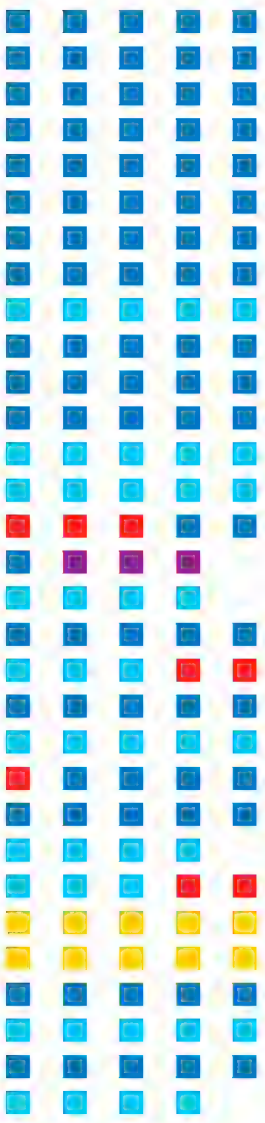
2018: **Yellow-legged Gull** Loch of Skene, North-East Scotland, 22 August; **Greenish Warbler** Girdle Ness, Torry Battery, North-East Scotland, 2 June.

Appendix 2

Summary of assessment of records by the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), the SBRC List, and other committees, 2016–20. All species and subspecies assessed by SBRC are included with two exceptions. First, any species or subspecies not on the *Scottish List* is automatically assessed by SBRC if it is not assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Second, some species on the *Scottish List* have additional rare subspecies assessed by BBRC that are not shown here. Species and subspecies considered by BBRC are listed on www.bbrc.org.uk/main-information/species-taxa



Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*
Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*
Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Continental Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa*
White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* (except *L. m. atlantis* - BBRC)
White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Franz Josef Land Little Auk *Alle alle polaris*
White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii*
Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*
Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*
Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*



Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*
Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*
Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* (except *L. s. badius* - BBRC)
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*
Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (except *C. d. daurica* or *japonica* - BBRC)
Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*
Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*
Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*
Western/Eastern Subalpine Warbler *Curruca iberiae/cantillans**
Dartford Warbler *Curruca undata*
Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* (except *L. m. golzii* - BBRC)
Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni**
Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*
Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica*
Serin *Serinus serinus*
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*
Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

■ = SBRC ■ = BBRC ■ = SBRC except Northern Isles (Fair Isle, Orkney and Shetland) ■ = SBRC except Shetland and Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC except Fair Isle and Shetland ■ = SBRC except Outer Hebrides ■ = SBRC outside core range www.the-soc.org.uk/content/bird-recording/sbrc/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills

* From 1 January 2019, all records to be considered by BBRC.

The species and subspecies considered by SBRC listed here are also shown on www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/sbrc-list-past-lists

Appendix 3

Correction to previous reports:

2018: Parrot Crossbill. It was stated that an influx in 1982 was of 20 birds. In fact, the total was 29, with the 20 from Shetland and Fair Isle only.

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Plate 101. Common Scoters off Dornoch, Moray Firth, Highland. © *Lyn Wells*

Roosting behaviour of Common Scoters off Dornoch in the Moray Firth

D. PATTERSON

Survey work during winter 2019/20 showed that during the non-breeding season, Common Scoters commuted from their daylight feeding areas to a favoured nocturnal roost. These findings suggest there are consistent patterns to scoter roosting behaviour. Identification of roost zones may have conservation significance, especially in relation to Special Protection Areas for scoters.

Introduction

The most important area for non-breeding Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* in Scotland is the Moray Firth, where large numbers occur between Spey Bay and Nairn Bar, with concentrations off Dornoch (Forrester *et al.* 2007). In recognition of this, the Moray Firth is now a marine Special Protection Area (SPA), for Common Scoter (and other marine waterfowl species), with a mean of 5,479 derived from land-based counts (Lawson *et al.* 2015, SNH 2016). Observations from 2015–2019 and systematic marine waterfowl monitoring have shown high and sustained numbers of scoters in the Outer Dornoch Firth (Patterson 2019). In addition, digital aerial surveys commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage during the 2019/20 non-breeding season provided broadly similar estimates and confirmed the continuing importance of the Moray Firth SPA to wintering Common Scoter (K. Thompson, pers. comm.).

Mudge (1978) and Mudge & Allen (1980) undertook Common Scoter observations at Dornoch, and noted that, at dusk, Common Scoter tended to swim (not fly) away from the shore. This behaviour was also mentioned by Cramp & Simmons (1977). Studies of other scoter species elsewhere suggest these sea ducks do not feed at night in winter (e.g. Lewis *et al.* 2005). If the same is true for the Moray Firth Common Scoters, this implies a need to increase our knowledge of scoter roosting areas, in addition to their daytime feeding sites (Woodward & Humphreys 2018). To contribute to our understanding of how Common Scoter use the SPA and to gauge if there were any consistent patterns to roosting behaviour, scoter movements were observed after sunset during winter 2019/20.

Methods

Common Scoter behaviour was recorded from an elevated observation point (10–15m above sea-level) overlooking the Outer Dornoch Firth (Figure 1). Observations took place from approximately 45–60 minutes before sunset, using a 77 mm Kowa telescope, switching from a 20–60x zoom eyepiece to a 20x wide angle eyepiece after sunset, to maximise available light. Observations ceased when it became too dark to identify any relevant bird behaviour and/or movements. Two roost assessments were undertaken per month from November to February, during winter 2019/20. The date chosen for an assessment was usually at weekends and influenced by suitable weather conditions, normally light winds and calm seas. Flock searches were undertaken, counted and movements of flocks were monitored, including times and locations. Using features on the horizon (where possible), the approximate location of focal flocks was plotted at pre-roost and again when observations were forced to stop due to darkness. Limitations of this survey work included visibility being hampered by sea heat haze. In addition, there were challenges in viewing scoters in diminishing light at a distance and determining the location of flocks at sea.

Results

In all, eight dusk observations were undertaken during the non-breeding season, with an average of 77 minutes per survey session (range 50–100 minutes), totalling 10.2 hours. The average flock size for behavioural observations was 2,122 (n=16,980).

Each of the Common Scoter dusk observations recorded some form of consistent movement further offshore and normally away from their preferred daytime foraging sites (Table 1 & Figure 1). On two occasions (10 November and 4 January), a proportion of the scoter flock moved offshore, leaving some scoters behind at foraging areas as darkness started to set in (Table 1).

Table 1. Common Scoter roosting behaviour off Dornoch, Moray Firth, Highland, 2019/20. *Sunset times were acquired from BBC Weather App

Date	Focal flock size	Did focal flock(s) move?	Movement (time)	Official sunset time*	First birds moved after sunset (mins)	Observation ended	Approximate distance from forage to last observed night location (km)
10 Nov	2,170	Yes, partly - swim	16:25	16:05	20	16:25	0.8
24 Nov	1,750	Yes - fly	16:00	15:44	15	16:10	1.5
14 Dec	1,440	Yes - swim	16:15	15:28	45	16:25	1.3
27 Dec	210	Yes - swim	15:42	15:35	7	16:15	1.6
4 Jan	2,420	Yes, partly - swim	16:00	15:23	37	16:28	0.5
26 Jan	3,830	Yes - swim & fly	16:48	16:26	22	17:04	1.5
2 Feb	2,790	Yes - swim	16:55	16:43	12	17:08	0.8
23 Feb	2,370	Yes - swim	17:35	17:33	2	18:04	1.6

On two occasions (24 November and 26 January), it was possible to identify a location where birds were seen to rest and settle on the sea within a large and recognisable scoter flock (see Figure 1). These observations involved birds flying from their foraging zones after sunset, in contrast to the other occasions when birds swam. Scoter behaviour observed at the roost indicated that the birds were not feeding; instead the majority of the raft 'loafed'/rested, in addition to some minimal socialising behaviour.

The location of the nocturnal roost identified during this survey tied in with the location of nocturnal scoter rafts noted during *ad hoc* observations from the same observation point in the 2017/18 winter season (Patterson 2019). The use of this same general roosting area suggests that there may be some preference for a nocturnal roost area, even when they feed in different locations (Figure 2).

Discussion

These observations confirmed that after dusk Common Scoters moved further offshore away from their daytime foraging areas. A telemetry study of non-breeding scoters in British Columbia (Canada), which was able to distinguish between diving birds and those remaining on the surface, found dramatic differences in behaviour between day-time and night-time periods involving both Surf Scoters *Mellanita perspicillata* and White-winged Scoters *Mellanita deglandi* (Lewis *et al.* 2005). This study found that both scoter species rarely foraged during the night. Instead, they located themselves further offshore and in deeper water. The same study found that only three individuals out of 151 foraged during the night, which only occurred during mid to late January. The available daylight during this period was approximately ten hours. The authors believed that the rare occurrence of nocturnal diving during the shortest days of winter suggested that the scoters may have been compensating for the short duration of daylight, when foraging normally occurs. In addition to this, Systad *et al.* (2000) found that some sea duck species extended their daytime feeding into crepuscular periods to cope with reduced winter daylight. McNeil *et al.* (1992) acknowledged that energetic needs changed seasonally, so the intensity and occurrence

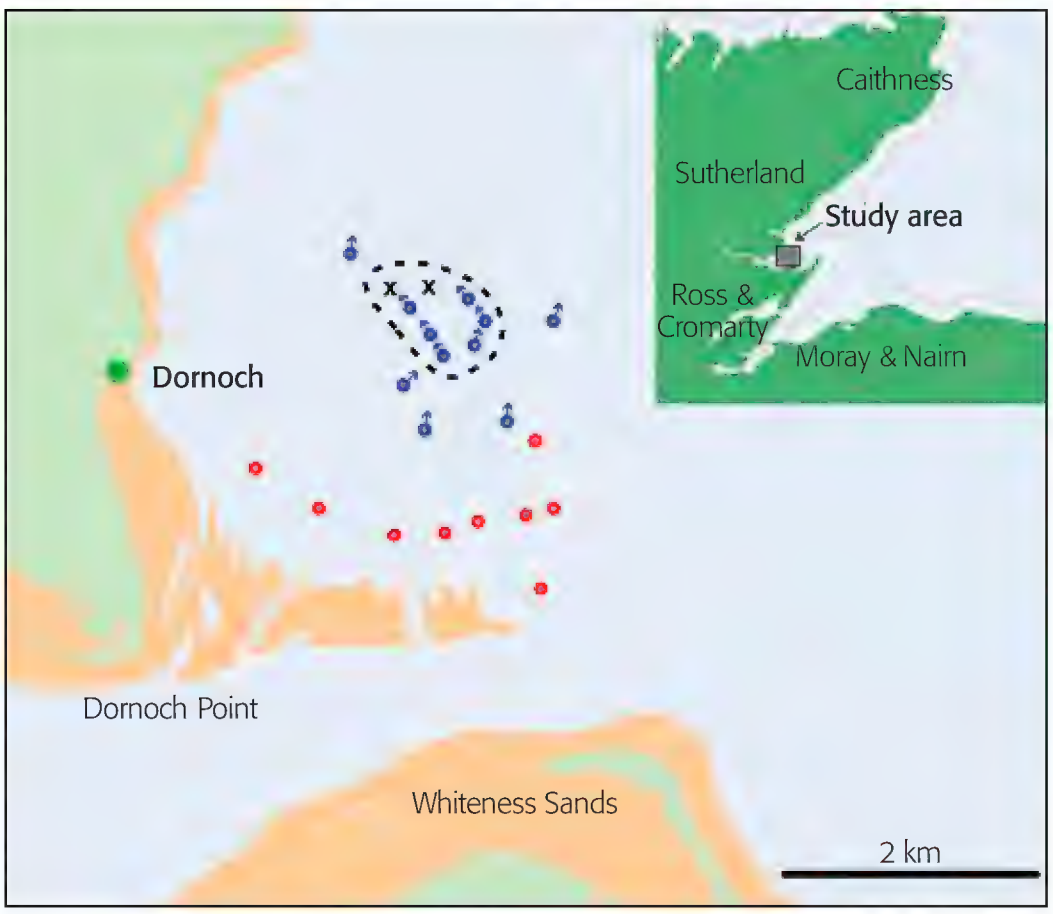

Figure 1. Approximate location of Common Scoter flocks moving to roost (in blue). Foraging/pre-roost areas are also shown (in red). November 2019 to February 2020. Key: X - Static roosting flock. Dashed circle shows approximate location of roost zone. Blue dots and arrows show last recorded positions and approximate directions. All dots represent approximate centre of flocks. The observation point is shown as a green dot. (*Figure prepared by Ian Andrews*)

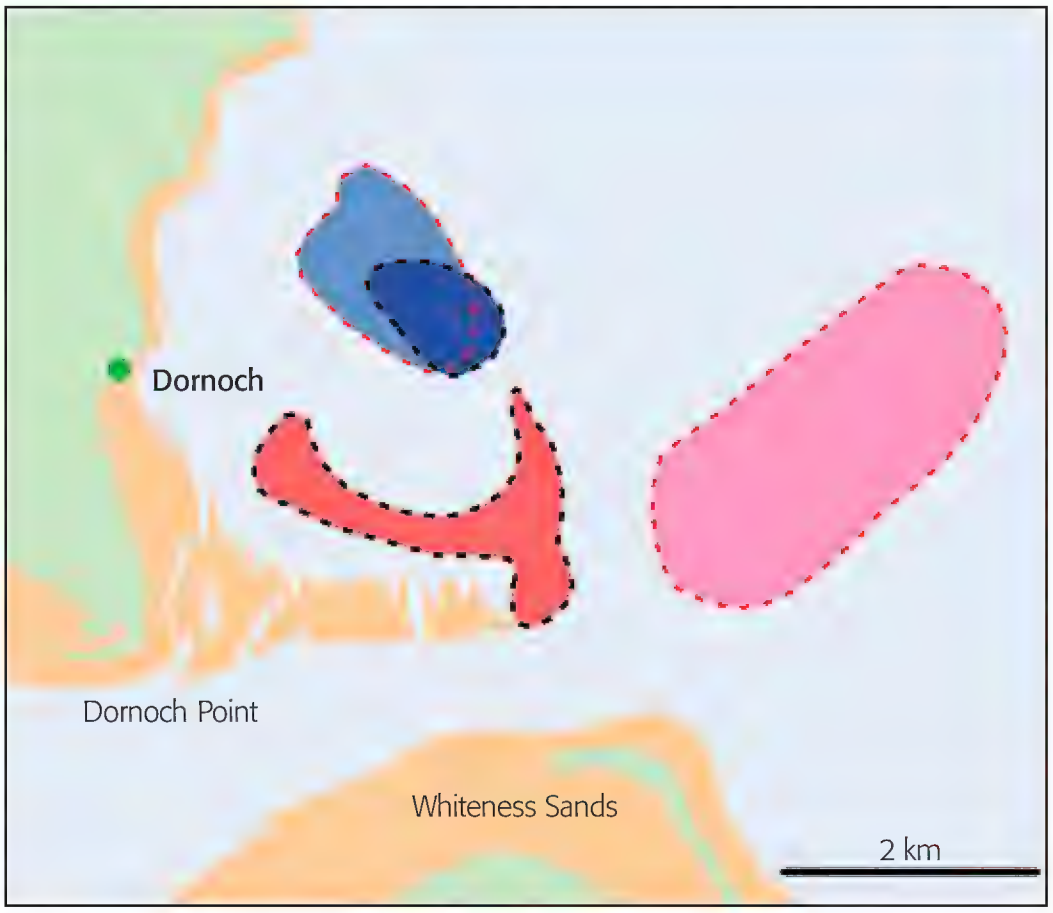

Figure 2. The approximate location of the Common Scoter roost zones (blue) and foraging/pre-roost areas (red) in two winters, 2017/18 and 2019/20. Key: darker colours represent results from this study (2019/20); paler colours represent observations from 2017/18. The observation point is shown as a green dot. (*Figure prepared by Ian Andrews*)

of nocturnal foraging varied accordingly. The available daylight (between sunrise and sunset) at Dornoch on 4 January 2020 for example was less than seven hours. Lewis *et al.* (2005) believed that, at night, the loss of visual cues may make nocturnal foraging energetically costly. However, Kaiser *et al.* (2007) acknowledged that in Liverpool Bay, an important UK scoter site, scoters are unlikely to be visual feeders, as the water there is especially turbid. Perhaps foraging strategies are influenced by the relative energetic costs/rewards dictated by prey quality and density, which will be different for each site.

At Dornoch, birds preferred to swim out to the nocturnal roost, rather than fly (although two roost flights were recorded). It is unknown how far individuals will travel from foraging areas to a nocturnal roost site. However, this survey indicates that, at this location, scoters will either swim or fly at least *c.* 1.6 km to roost. It seems likely that the location of foraging sites will influence which roost areas Scoters might use. For example, Fox (2003) identifies that food supply is likely to play a major role in determining how birds are distributed in time and space. This is confirmed by Schwemmer *et al.* (2019), as they found that the Common Scoter distribution in the German Wadden Sea is predicted by the density of its favoured prey (American Razor Clam *Ensis leei*), as well as hydrographic parameters.

Although only one Common Scoter roost zone was identified, it was noted that some birds may roost either in isolation or in small groups independent of large rafts. However, if identified roost zones are used in subsequent years, as suggested by this survey, then there may be a need to acknowledge that some wintering habitats little used by scoters during the day, may be important at night (McNeil *et al.* 1992).

At present, it is unknown why Common Scoters should choose to move further out into deeper water for nocturnal roosting. Daytime scoter presence is strongly influenced by the distribution and quantity of appropriate prey, which in turn is also influenced by a combination of physical parameters, for example levels of shear stress and wave erosion at the seabed. A certain level of water movement at the seabed is necessary for benthos food supply (Kaiser *et al.* 2006). At Dornoch, scoters often chose to forage in waters subject to steady currents (subject to tidal patterns), often resulting in birds having to regularly reposition to remain over favoured feeding sites. As surface current speed is related to seabed shear, birds may be unable to sleep or rest at their foraging locations due to constantly having to reposition and, as a result, use valuable energy resources. Some areas may offer lower surface flow, benefitting birds that want to conserve energy during long, cold winter nights. However, it is unknown where birds may choose to roost during storms, as these conditions will create considerable wave action that cannot be avoided. To further our understanding of roosting scoters, nocturnal observations using specialised night scopes or other equipment may be able to identify additional roost zones and perhaps improve upon the accuracy of determining roost locations. In addition, the observations may also help us gauge whether scoters continue to maintain tight rafts at night or whether some may have a more fragmented nocturnal strategy.

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Plate 102. Male Lesser Whitethroat in song, Fairways View, Irvine, Ayrshire, May 2019. © *Photos by Tom Byars*

Lesser Whitethroats in Ayrshire: does emergent scrub provide a new breeding habitat?

T. BYARS

In Ayrshire, Lesser Whitethroat breeding territories have always been in open areas of ungrazed Hawthorn and/or Blackthorn scrub with a dense understorey of other bushes and Bramble. Since 2012 some Lesser Whitethroats have bred in dense areas of low emergent Gorse scrub mixed with Broom. Comparisons between Traditional Breeding Habitat territories and New Breeding Habitat territories showed that canopy height was significantly lower in New Breeding Habitat territories. In the traditional territories, Hawthorn, Bramble and Gorse were the most common species. In new territories, Gorse and Broom were the dominant species as Hawthorn and Bramble have not yet fully developed. The use of emergent Gorse/Broom scrub as breeding habitat has not been documented in Scotland before. It allows Lesser Whitethroats to utilise an earlier stage in the vegetation succession. This may allow the species to colonise suitable areas outwith the Clyde/Forth valleys, where thorn scrub habitat is scarce.

Introduction

The Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* has been studied extensively in Ayrshire since 1983 when the species was undertaking range expansion throughout southern Scotland (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The breeding distribution is mainly coastal. In the UK, Lesser Whitethroats expanded their range northwards by 33% between the 1968–72 and 2007–11 breeding atlases. This has been attributed to climate change (Balmer *et al.* 2013). I wanted to make an accurate assessment of the current Ayrshire breeding population and discover if the species had started to colonise other habitats as suggested in our previous papers (Byars *et al.* 1991, Byars 2010).

Plate 103. Lesser Whitethroat nest, Garnock East, Ayrshire, June 2011.

Study areas

The study area covers the Ayrshire recording area. All habitat sites had been identified from previous surveys, local bird reports and information from other observers. In Ayrshire, typical Lesser Whitethroat breeding habitat consists of open areas of mature Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and/or Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* scrub with a dense understorey of Bramble *Rubus* sp., Gorse *Ulex europaeus,* Dog Rose *Rosa canina* and Willow *Salix* sp. Breeding habitat usually forms distinct habitat islands, often surrounded by other habitats such as farmland, heath, waste ground (brownfield sites), marsh and ponds. All sites were located within 3 km of the coast, situated mostly on a slope and below 200 m elevation.

Methods

All suitable habitat which had previously held territories was checked every one to two days during a 30–35 day period between April to July and annually from 2006 to 2019. Any breeding territories newly discovered were also checked within the same time frame. Breeding habitats were estimated in hectares and territories were mapped using census techniques as explained in Byars *et al.* (1991). A total of eight habitat sites known to regularly contain Lesser Whitethroat territories during the study period were chosen to investigate their vegetation structure (Table 1). Four (Plates 104–106) were classed as Traditional Breeding Habitat (TBH) and the other four (Plates 107–109) were defined as New Breeding Habitat (NBH). As with previous studies, vegetation sampling at all eight sites using a quadrat method was carried out (Byars *et al.* 1991). This involved placing a 100 m transect line within the territory and using a random number generator (0–100). Fifteen sampling sites were then located along the transect line. At each sampling site, a one metre quadrat was then placed at ground level and all plant species were identified within this square. Percentage cover and vegetation density were also estimated from vertically stacked height bands from 0–1 m, 1–2 m, 2–3 m, 3–4 m, and so on until the top canopy had been recorded. Statistical analyses were carried out to identify height and vegetation differences between the TBH and NBH.

Table 1. The eight Lesser Whitethroat study areas in Ayrshire.

Site number and name	Grid reference	Altitude (m)	Habitat area (ha)
Traditional Breeding Habitat (TBH)			
1. Ardeer Pipe Embankment	NS 291 420	6	0.81
2. Ardeer Fen (east)	NS 287 418	7	1.21
3. Bracken Bay	NS 277 179	48	0.72
4. Garnock Floods	NS 307 416	4	0.58
New Breeding Habitat (NBH)			
5. Hillhouse Quarry (south)	NS 347 333	60	2.46
6. Garnock East	NS 303 413	7	1.10
7. Garnock Lagoons	NS 298 416	4	0.80
8. Fairways View	NS 312 404	11	0.33

Results

Over the 2006–19 study period, the Ayrshire Lesser Whitethroat population varied from 10 to 22 occupied territories (Table 2). The number of territories in the TBH sites ranged from five to 15 and three to five territories in the NBH sites, reflecting recent establishment there.

Table 2. Number of Lesser Whitethroat territories recorded in Ayrshire, 2006–19.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of territories	11	10	12	10	16	14	22	17	18	20	11	15	11	10

The four TBH sites contained mature Hawthorn canopy (maximum height between 4–6 m), whilst the four NBH sites had a much lower canopy height level of Gorse/Broom (maximum height between 2–4 m). The median vegetation heights of the two groups are shown in Figure 1. A Mann Whitney U test on 120 height measurements showed that the difference between the median

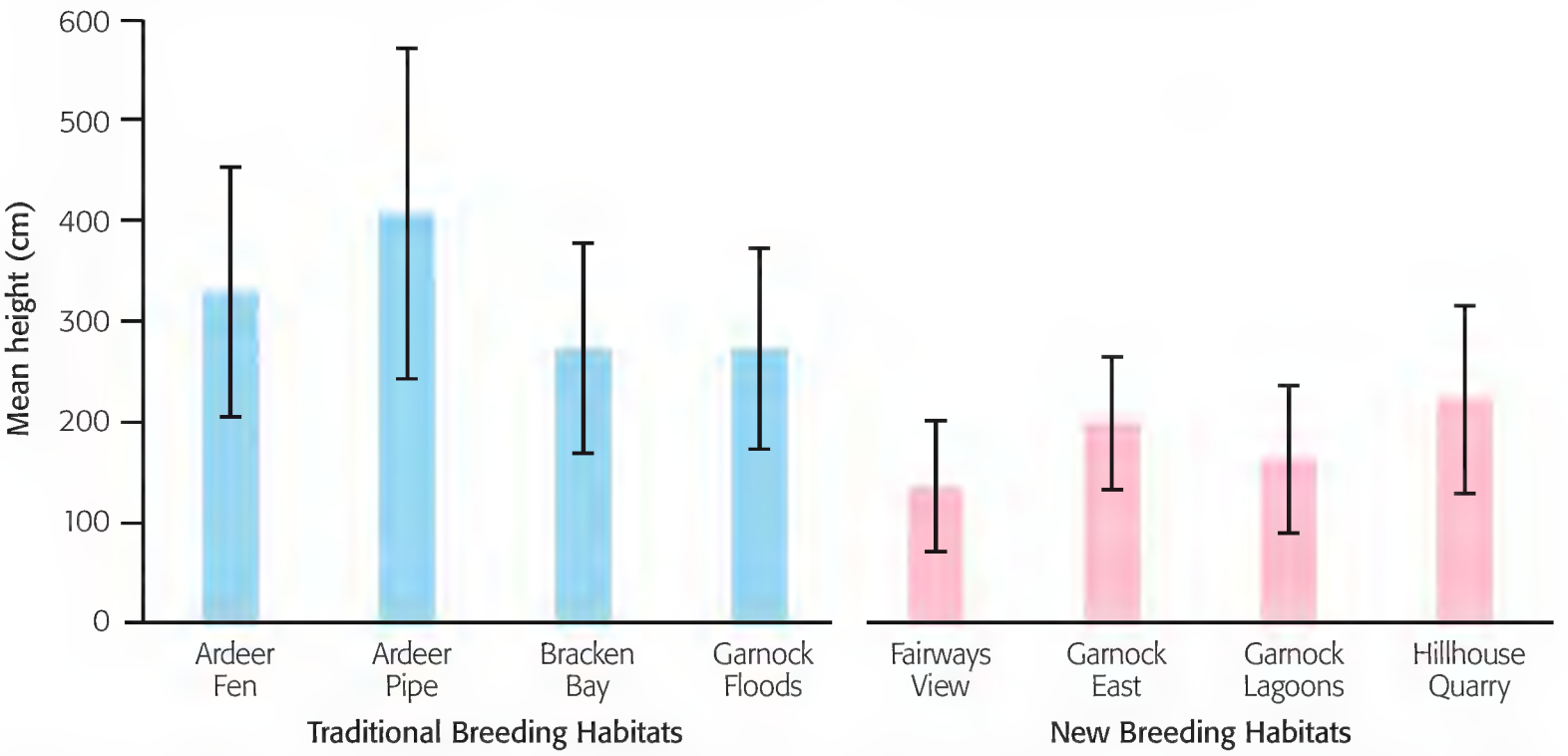

Figure 1. Comparison of the mean heights of vegetation (with standard deviations) in the Traditional Breeding Habitat sites (pale blue) and New Breeding Habitat sites (pale pink), Ayrshire.

vegetation height for the traditional locations (300 cm) and new locations (194.5 cm) was statistically significant (W=4765. P<0.005, n=120). The proportions of the plant species in the two sites are summarised in Figure 2. The traditional sites had a greater range of vegetation with ten species recorded, compared to the new sites which had seven species of vegetation. With the exception of rush *Juncus* sp. at new sites, the species were similar though not the proportions. The differences in vegetation can be seen in Figures 2a &tb. Hawthorn was more likely to be found at the traditional sites, while Gorse and Broom were the most common species at new sites. In traditional sites, Hawthorn, Gorse and Bramble accounted on average for 78% of the vegetation. The same

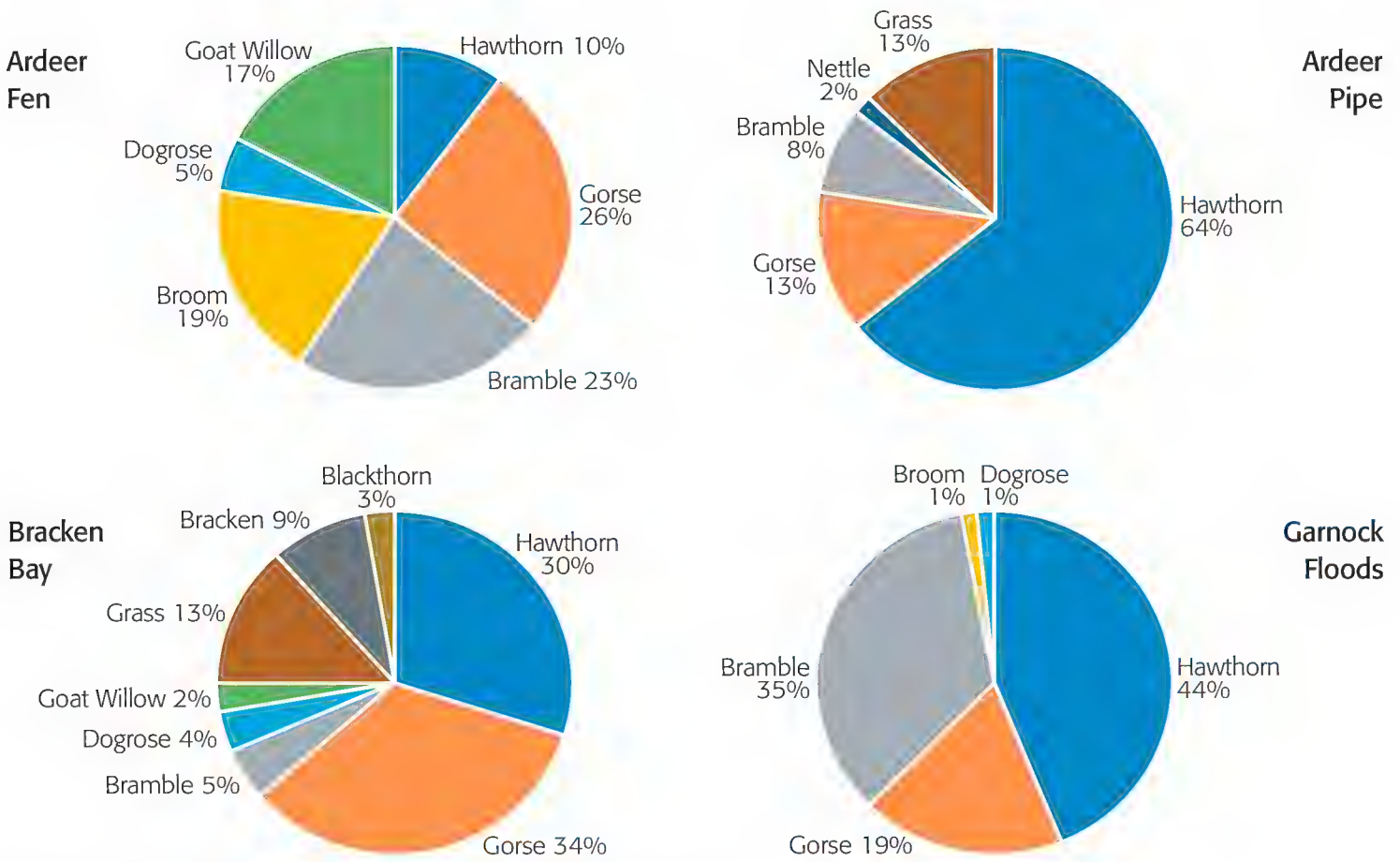

Figure 2a. Proportions of different vegetation in Traditional Breeding Habitats, Ayrshire.

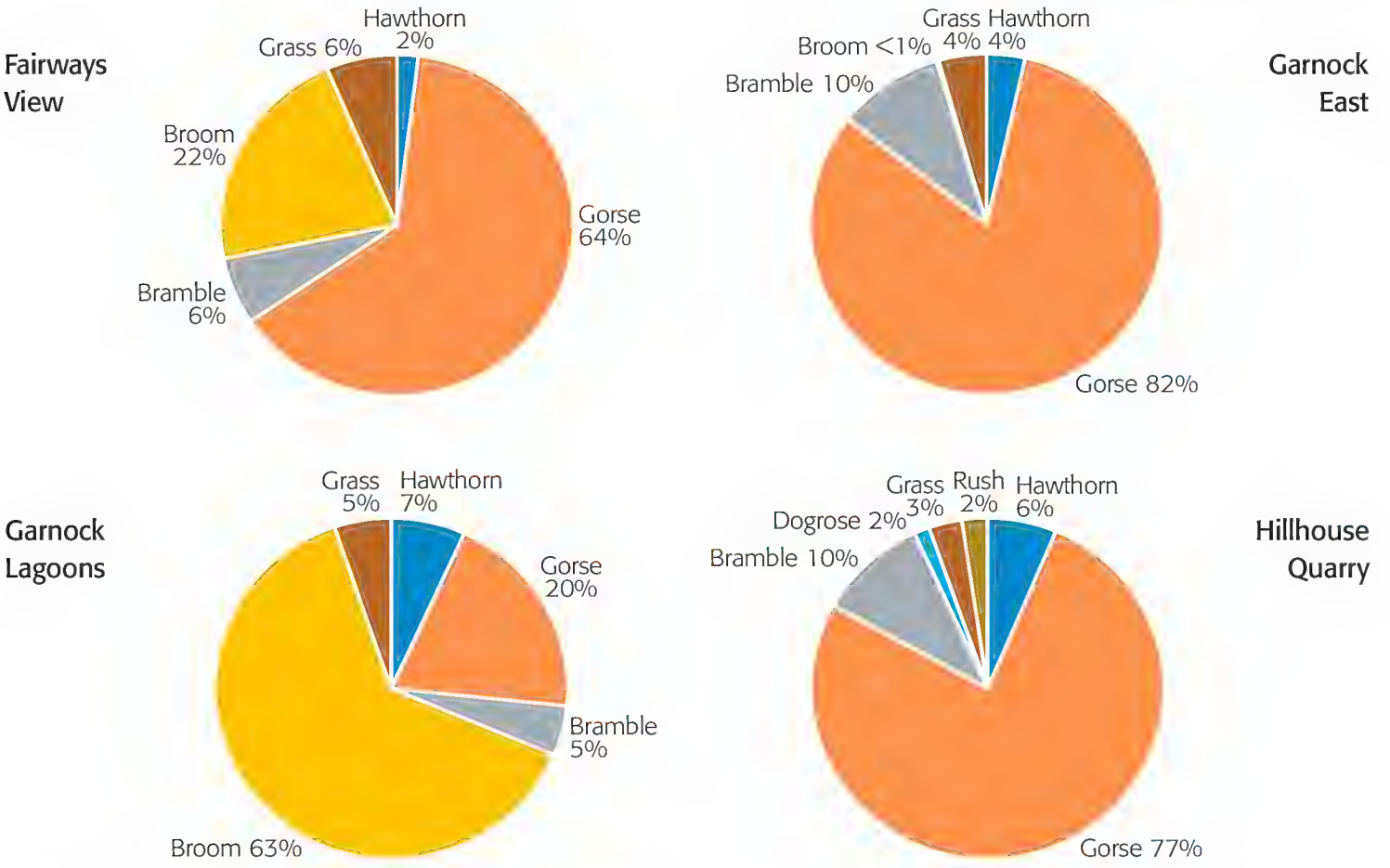

Figure 2b. Proportions of different vegetation in New Breeding Habitats, Ayrshire.

three species accounted for 73% at the new sites. However, the proportions of the three species were quite different. Except for one site, Garnock Lagoons, all the new sites had Gorse cover of more than 60%. Garnock Lagoons only had 20% Gorse cover. However, that site did have three times as much Broom (63%) than any of the other new sites. Interestingly, three of the four NBH sites were discovered after 2006, indicating that this type of breeding habitat has only recently started to be utilised by Lesser Whitethroats - despite traditional habitat being available nearby.

Discussion

In Scotland, Lesser Whitethroats usually breed in open Hawthorn/Blackthorn scrub with a dense understorey of plants such as Bramble, Gorse, Dog Rose and Willow where nests are normally sited at around 1m in height (Byars *et al.* 1991, Byars 2010). Thorn scrub in some coastal locations may be exposed to the prevailing winds and the thorn canopy can appear stunted in height at 2–3 m (pers. obs., Mearns 2012). This thorn scrub habitat is extremely scarce in Ayrshire, hence the restricted breeding distribution there. It seems that for the breeding population to increase, Lesser Whitethroats would have to colonise other habitat types. This appears to be happening now, as Lesser Whitethroats are successfully utilising a new type of breeding habitat in Ayrshire. This could have implications for future range expansion, which up to now may have been limited by the lack of suitable areas of traditional thorn scrub breeding habitat. The traditional type of vegetation is scarce in large parts of Scotland although there are areas with Hawthorn or Blackthorn but no breeding Lesser Whitethroats while in East Lothian some Lesser Whitethroats breed in Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* (S. da Prato pers. comm.). In the Lothians, where they were found to be colonising in the 1970s, numbers have declined. The estimate of 100 territories in Lothian & Borders in 2007–13 compares to 180–200 in the previous regional tetrad atlas carried out in 1988–94 (Murray *et al.* 2019). There is no evidence that numbers have picked up in Lothian & Borders since 2013 although Dumfries & Galloway has seen a significant population increase of up to 200 pairs (Mearns 2012). Lesser Whitethroats are on the edge of their European range in Scotland and numbers of spring arrivals can fluctuate according to weather patterns at migration time (Marchant *et al.* 1990).

Plate 104. Traditional Breeding Habitat, Garnock Floods, Ayrshire, May 2016.

Plates 105–106. Traditional Breeding Habitat, (left) Ardeer Pipe, Ayrshire, July 2020, (right) Bracken Bay, Ayrshire, June 2011.

The implication for future atlas/survey work is that as well as focusing upon traditional habitat types, there should be equal effort in searching emergent scrub habitat to determine the status of breeding Lesser Whitethroats in Scotland.

Acknowledgments

I thank Dave Grant who made useful comments on an earlier draft, sorted out my raw data and presented it into statistically significant figures, thanks also to Ian Andrews for preparing the figures. I would also like to thank Angus Hogg for reading an earlier draft and providing valuable guidance. I would like to dedicate this paper to my brother-in-law, Mark, who sadly died from bowel cancer in July last year. Mark was always keen to hear about how the 'Lessers' were doing every breeding season and he was really looking forward to reading this paper.

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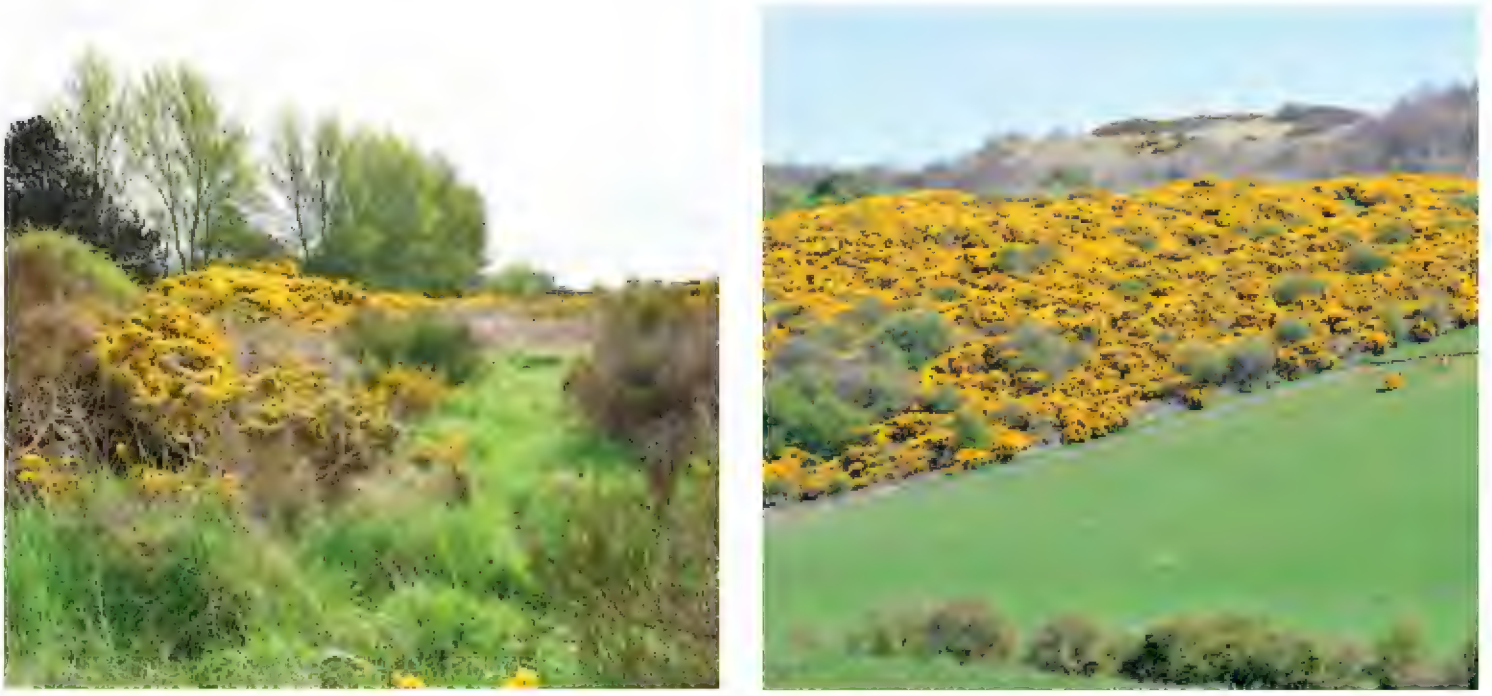

Plates 107–108. New Breeding Habitat, (left) Fairways View, Ayrshire, May 2018, (right) Hillhouse, Ayrshire, April 2018.

Plate 109. New Breeding Habitat, Garnock, Ayrshire, May 2015.

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Breeding Fieldfares: are we missing some?

The Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* is a very rare and declining breeding species in the UK, with several recent years when none have been reported. Their UK distribution is largely northerly and easterly, with the majority in Northumberland and Borders, but with regular records from Highland and some on the Northern Isles. The first proved breeding was in 1967 on Orkney (Sharrock 1976). The 1968–72 Atlas (Sharrock 1976) recorded Fieldfares in 35 10 km squares (17 possible, three probable and 15 confirmed breeding) and listed a range of potential breeding habitats from farmland to upland scrub, forestry plantations, woodland edge and nesting on the ground, many near water. The distribution map highlighted the uplands of Scotland north and east of Perth as having the most records. Forrester *et al.* (2007) suggested most habitats used by breeding birds in the UK have been valleys in moorland areas, upland birch woods or the edges of plantations. The 1988–91 (Gibbons *et al.* 1993) and 2007–11 atlases (Balmer *et al.* 2013) indicated a southerly shift with records running along the spine of Britain from the Peak District, through Yorkshire, Lancashire, Northumberland, Borders with a decline in records from the Highlands. In south-east Scotland, there were probably up to five, possibly up to ten, pairs per year attempting to breed between 1988–94 (Murray *et al.* 1998). From 2008–13, the most recent Scottish regional atlas showed that usually there were none but sometimes up to two or three pairs per year that attempted to breed (Murray *et al.* 2019). In Northumberland, in 1988–92 there were records in five tetrads (two confirmed breeding) but in 2008–11 only two tetrads with no confirmed breeding.

More recently Northumberland, the Borders, Dumfries & Galloway and the Central Belt seem to have become the core area (Rare Breeding Birds Panel, Dr Mark Eaton, pers. comm.). The peak years of confirmed breeding were 1989–90 when 12–13 pairs were recorded; more recently the running five-year mean has been two to three breeding pairs with a decline of 80% over 25 years and several recent blank years (RBBP Dr Mark Eaton, pers. comm.).

I have received a number of summering and breeding reports from 2010–20 across Dumfries & Galloway. All have been associated with conifer plantation edges or small stands, adjoining damp rushy pasture either semi or unimproved at an altitude of between 100 m and 250 m asl. One summering record was in more intensive rich pasture/silage agricultural land. Records have been widely scattered from the east to the west of Dumfries & Galloway and into south Ayrshire, all in remote areas seldom visited by birdwatchers. Given the extent of this habitat in south-west Scotland and the paucity of coverage it is highly likely other pairs will have gone undetected. This note really is a heads up to all birdwatchers across Scotland and northern England to be aware that there may be more birds out there and to pay more attention to thrushes in and around conifer plantations, especially in areas of rushy hill pasture. The submitted records amount to three proven breeding pairs and three cases of summering birds over an 11-year period in a region with no previous summering records. These records have been casual in nature or from Environmental Impact Assessments, generally in remote areas, and not a result of species-specific searches.

Dumfries & Galloway records

2010: On 28 May, a pair was recorded carrying food to a small hill plantation adjoining rushy pasture, in the very east of the region, 250 m asl.

2012: Two occurrences 1.5 km apart possibly of the same bird present from May to October, visiting gardens in an area of rich pasture, in the east of the region, with numerous small plantations, 125 m asl.

2018: On 19 June, an adult repeatedly carrying food from a rushy pasture into a conifer plantation In the central and northern part of the region, 250 m asl.

2019: A single adult reported in mid-summer in rushy pasture in South Ayrshire in an area of moorland and plantations.

2020: A single adult was present through May to mid-June in rushy pasture along a section of river near conifer

plantations and broadleaved scrubby woodland. This was on the border with South Ayrshire to the west of Dumfries & Galloway, 120 m asl.

2020: On 4 August, a pair was feeding young in open rushy grassland in the middle of an extensive plantation, 183 m asl. They were also seen and heard at the same location earlier in the breeding season.

In addition, there is a further record from the Borders in 2018 of a pair reported along the edge of a small conifer plantation (RBBP).

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I would like to thank the editors and a referee for helpful suggestions and bringing my attention to additional records and reports.

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Red-throated Diver probably breeding on River Spey

The early phase of the COVID-19 crisis constrained birders' ability to carry out fieldwork or indulge in recreational birdwatching and, like many others, I enjoyed so-called 'lockdown birding', seeing how many species I could record within the Government-imposed five-mile limit around my home by the middle reaches of the River Spey (Highland). A sighting of a Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* flying upstream on 19 April 2020 was an unexpected addition to my list and I assumed it was bound for some distant breeding site. On 18 May, I was surprised to find a pair feeding on the river some 2 km from my first sighting. Although the Spey at this point is about 100 m wide and rather sluggish (when not in spate) it is hardly typical diver habitat - Cramp & Simmons (1977) state "Tolerates ... occasionally slow-flowing rivers" but with no mention of breeding on rivers. Along with other observers, I heard or saw single divers on a few subsequent occasions within a 3 km radius of my sighting of the pair and assumed they were either making feeding flights from some unknown breeding loch or were merely summering non-breeders. On 10 August, I saw an adult and an almost fully grown juvenile diver 5 km downstream from the 18 May sighting. Both were fishing and the youngster frequently, but unsuccessfully, solicited food from the parent. What I found remarkable, however, was that they were seemingly unconcerned about a (human) family swimming and canoeing within 50 m of them over a period of 30 minutes observation. The nearby landowner told me that the birds had been there for several weeks and had earlier been extremely noisy.

Plate 110. Adult and juvenile Red-throated Divers, River Spey, Highland, August 2020. © *Anon*

Although the evidence is circumstantial, it seems likely that the Red-throated Divers nested close to this last sighting although there is no known breeding site nearby. The riverbank is gently shelving with frequent *Carex* beds, rather similar to the more usual lochan breeding habitat. The unique lack of disturbance from anglers, canoeists, and walkers in 2020 probably enabled a successful breeding attempt in this atypical location.

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ms accepted October 2020

First breeding of Hawfinch in Clyde

The Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* breeds in mature woodland. It is secretive and inconspicuous, despite its large size, so may easily be overlooked. Since the 1970s the breeding range in Scotland has been confined to a handful of sites in the eastern Borders, Lothian, Perth & Kinross and North-East Scotland, with an estimated breeding population of about 40–75 pairs (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The only confirmed breeding records from the west of Scotland are a few from 1906 to the 1980s in Dumfries & Galloway and one there in 2012 (Henderson 2014), although a pair was seen at Rowardennan on the east side of Loch Lomond on 5 May 1993 (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Numbers of migrant Hawfinches reported in Scotland have increased since the mid-1980s, but the breeding population has declined considerably in most of Britain (Langston *et al.* 2002). Balmer *et al.* (2013) reported that over three-quarters of the former breeding range in Britain was abandoned between 1968 and 2007, and that total breeding numbers fell by about 70%. This decline may be related to an increase in nest predation which seems to be particularly high (Gibbons *et al.* 1993, Langston *et al.* 2002).

Plate 111. Pair of Hawfinches collecting sunflower seeds, Tarbet, Clyde, 1 June 2020. © *R.W. Furness*

It is thought that Hawfinches that breed in Britain do not migrate, and that spring and autumn migrants are birds from Scandinavia or Russia (Forrester *et al.* 2007). It therefore came as a huge surprise to see a male Hawfinch coming to our bird table in the wooded slopes west of Loch Lomond on the edge of Tarbet, Clyde, during late May 2020. The bird was elusive, flying off whenever it saw a person looking out the window, but it returned several times daily to feed on the bird table on sunflower hearts, alongside the typical variety of garden birds. In Britain, resident Hawfinches mostly lay eggs during May, and migrants have normally departed by then, so the date seemed strange for a bird that might most likely either be a migrant or a dispersing resident. However, on 1 June it was joined on the bird table by a female Hawfinch (Plate 111). To our even greater surprise, the male regurgitated food to the female and the female flew off to trees about 150 m to the southwest in a particularly mature area of the local woodland. She returned several times, each time being given food by the male (despite standing on a bird table covered with food), and each time flying directly from the bird table to the same area about 150 m away. According to Cramp & Perrins (1994) male Hawfinches usually pass food to females to give to young chicks, so this behaviour, which was first seen on 1 June and had almost certainly not been occurring on

previous days, appeared to suggest that the pair had newly-hatched chicks.

On 4 June we put up a mist net as part of normal bird ringing activities, but of course hoped to also catch and ring a Hawfinch on this occasion, and we were successful. Examination in the hand showed that the female had a fully bare and vascularised brood patch, suggesting that she had been incubating eggs or brooding small chicks (Murton & Westwood 1977). Both the male and the female returned to the bird table several times on each of the following days, with both birds carrying food away to the same group of trees. We had hoped eventually to see fledgling Hawfinches coming to the bird table, but sadly that did not happen. The adults disappeared around mid-June and have not been present since. There are large numbers of Jays *Garrulus glandarius* in the local deciduous woodland, and this species is thought to be partly responsible for the particularly high failure rate of Hawfinch nests (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Pine Martens *Martes martes* are now common in the area and are predators of bird nests. The local population of Red Squirrels *Sciurus vulgaris* has increased considerably with the maturing of plantation forestry, and this species will take chicks from nests at a time of year when conifer seeds are not available, so it is possible that the breeding attempt failed as a result of predation, but that can only be speculation.

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Very late fledging of a young Shag

Each summer between 2009 and 2020, we have followed the breeding of Shags *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* at three small colonies at Portknockie, Moray & Nairn. We also visited the area at approximately weekly intervals during the rest of the year to check for colour-ringed Shags as part of a large-scale research project in eastern Britain coordinated by Aberdeen University and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. In 2020, COVID-19 travel restrictions initially disrupted the summer's fieldwork but we were still able to follow the breeding of 130 pairs that completed a nest. Breeding was taken as being successful if, when a chick was last seen, it was of an age and state of development such that we expected it to have fledged by the time of the next check. Based on these criteria, 233 chicks fledged. Given the disruption of checks early in the summer, we might have missed a very few early nests which failed and where the pair did not relay. However, the average of 1.79 chicks fledged per completed nest was the second most productive year during the study with only 2011 being higher at 2.11. By 1 September, only three nests were still active. Of these, one brood of small chicks had disappeared by the next check on 7 September, a brood of two young had fledged by the next check on 14 September and another brood of two young had fledged by the check on 21 September. This is not an exceptionally late date for this colony,

given that chicks fledged during the first few days of October in three of the 12 years.

It was, however, a surprise when during a search for colour-ringed birds at the colony at Scarth Craig, Tronach, 1.5 km to the west, on 6 October we discovered a nest with a single well-feathered chick. This seemed healthy and was seen being fed. The chick was still present on 17 October when it was exercising its wings and still showing the sheaths of the growing tail feathers (Plate 112) but had gone by 20 October. The normal incubation period for the Shag is about 36 days from the laying of the first egg (or 31 days from the laying of the last egg) and the normal fledging period is about 53 days (Potts *et al.* 1980) which suggests that this clutch would have been started around 20 July. Usefully, photographs of this colony had been taken on two days earlier in the season (Plate 112). On 27 May, there were two birds at this nest but no sign of any eggs. while on 24 June an adult appears to be incubating. The interval of 115 days between this apparent incubation and fledging is far too long. Given that Shags relay some three weeks after the loss of a clutch, we interpret this as either the bird was not incubating in June or the pair soon lost the eggs and the female relaid. In 2020, most pairs at Portknockie had laid by the end of April so it is possible that this was a second replacement clutch.

The Shag has a very prolonged breeding season and eggs have been reported at British colonies in every month except September and October and young in all months from February to November (Brun 1960, Potts 1968, Tong 1968). The timing of breeding varies greatly at a single colony but the Shag is often one of the earliest seabird species to lay and first egg

Plate 112. Progress of nesting of a pair of Shags on Scarth Craig, Tronach, Moray & Nairn in 2020. 27 May & 17 October © *Lenny Simpson*; 24 June © *Tim Morley*

dates are routinely reported at several colonies e.g. 51 years on the Isle of May, Firth of Forth where they range from 14 February to 20 May (UKCEH unpublished data). However, there is remarkably little information on the end of the breeding season at any colony.

There are few records of chicks in October at British colonies. Long-term data are available for two colonies. On the Isle of May over a period of 60 years there was a small chick 'in down' on 3 October 1962, a brood of three 'just ringable' (i.e. 2–3 weeks old) chicks on 3 October 1971, 'last chick' on 4 October 1997 and 'chicks still in a nest' on 17 October 1995 (Isle of May Bird Observatory and personal records). In another three years there were chicks recorded in late September which, if they had survived, would have been present in October. At Sumburgh Head, Shetland, there were chicks present up until 8 October in three out of 33 years (M. Heubeck pers. comm., W.T.S. Miles pers. comm.). However, by far the latest record we are aware of was at the Butt of Lewis, Outer Hebrides, where a clutch of three eggs hatched about 5 September 1916. Two young Shags were still in the nest on 24 October, one chick left the nest on 31 October. The other was present with an adult on 3 November but had gone three days later (Baxter & Rintoul 1953).

The Shag can be double-brooded i.e. a pair attempt to, and sometimes successfully, raise a second brood after its first brood has fledged. The November chicks at the Butt of Lewis and the Isle of May nest in 1995 were known to be such cases. However, a second brood is extremely rare and occurs mainly in an early breeding season when conditions are good and breeding success is high (Cadiou 1994, Wanless & Harris 1997, Purenne 2015, 2017). Six of the seven cases of October chicks at Portknockie, Tronach and Sumburgh, were from replacement clutches and the seventh was the only clutch laid in that nest that year. The majority of very late chicks are probably the results of pairs relaying rather than being double-brooded.

Given the lack of information on the end of breeding seasons, it would be useful if observers would document very late chicks still in the nest. However, care is needed since fledged chicks are sometimes fed, usually on the sea rocks under the colony, for some days or weeks (rarely for over a year (Snow 1960)) after fledging. Very rarely chicks return to the nest site after fledging. For instance, at Portknockie a pair roosting at a nest site where chicks had fledged at the end of July were joined by a juvenile (presumably their own since both adults preened it) on 12 and 29 October 2020. Thus, any records should also have contextual details.

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BTO/SOC Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 27 March & 3 April 2021

COVID-19 restrictions forced this year's spring meeting to be hosted via video conference, with talks spread over two Saturday afternoons and a mid-week evening quiz in between. However, a virtual event allows many more people to participate - 380 bookings compared to an audience of 200 at the physical meetings - with delegates Zooming in from South-East England, Norway and Canada.

The afternoon began with a warm welcome from Associate Director of BTO Scotland, Chris Wernham, and SOC President, Ian Bainbridge. Chris then introduced Rhys Green, who did his PhD at the Game Conservancy and has spent the past 30 years involved in bird conservation research. While working for RSPB's Research department he was seconded to the Zoology department at Cambridge University to help run its Conservation Science Group. Rhys retired from RSPB in 2017, but continues his research on the effects of human activities on populations of wild species.

The impact of lead poisoning on birds

Rhys Green - Honorary Professor of Conservation Science, University of Cambridge

Rhys is one of the UK scientists tacking this complex issue and delivered his talk in an accessible and understandable way. Lead toxicity remains a serious issue for birds, with a million wildfowl dying from lead poisoning each year in Europe alone. Lead is typically ingested by carrion eaters consuming shot animals, or by granivorous birds ingesting lead shot along with grit. Rhys highlighted the elevated lead levels in species like Buzzard, pointing out that besides the lethal effects there was increasing evidence that bird

Plate 113. Conference participants. © *Screen-grabbed images by Ben Darvill*

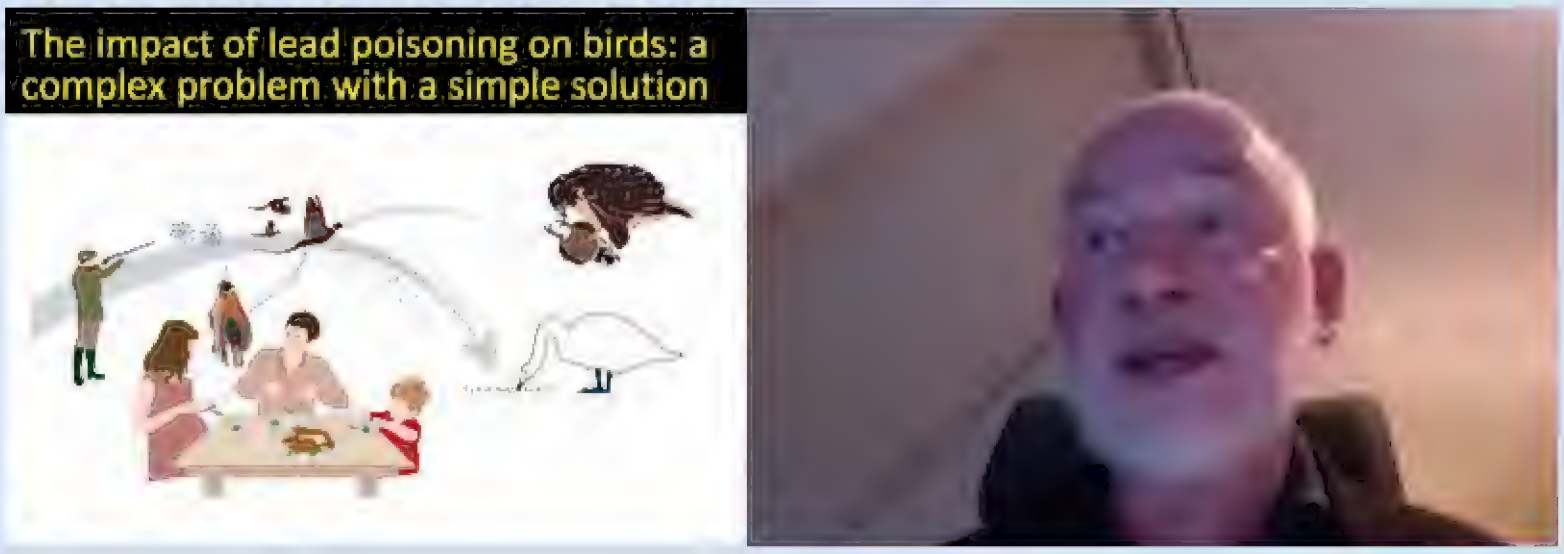


Plate 114. Rhys Green.

behaviour may be affected by sub-lethal levels. Not all species are affected equally; 15–20% of White-tailed Eagles in Europe, the most sensitive of raptors, die from lead poisoning.

Waterfowl remain the group most affected by lead toxicity. One of the most worrying trends is the strong relationship between increased lead levels and population decline; Pochard and White-headed Duck are declining at worrying rates, with over 30% having lead shot in their digestive system.

Despite the ban on using lead shot over water for over 20 years, there is worryingly low compliance (in England *c.* 30%). Responding public pressure, several shooting organisations now advocate the voluntary phasing out of lead fully over the next five years. However, recent research by Rhys and others reveals that over 99% of Pheasants in the UK are still lead-shot. There is obviously a long way still to go to remove this contaminant from our environment.

There was just time for one question from the audience: were there risks associated with the alternatives to lead shot? Rhys explained that safe, effective alternatives include steel or copper bullets as well as more expensive materials such as bismuth and tungsten. In countries where the ban on lead shot over wetlands is actively enforced, e.g. Denmark, the Netherlands, USA, concerns about bullets crippling birds and getting lodged in trees (and breaking saws), or the ban affecting uptake of the sport, have all been dispelled.

Jenny Weston

Jeremy Wilson, SOC Vice-President *Birding & Science*, chaired the remainder of the afternoon's session, introducing his long-term colleagues and friends, Dr John Bowler and Dr Alison MacLennan. John began his career at WWT where he spent nine years as a wildlife ecologist. He then spent three years on the Seychelles as warden of a reed island. This clearly gave him a taste for islands, as he returned to Scotland to settle on Tiree where he took up his current post with RSPB.

20 years of birding on Tiree

Dr John Bowler - Tiree Officer, RSPB

As a resident on Tiree for just shy of 20 years, John took us on a virtual journey around the habitats and seasons found on the 'Land below the waves'. The most westerly of the Inner Hebrides, Tiree has a long crofting history, and we learned how this low-intensity system enhances the bird-rich, shell sand machair habitat that comprises a third of the island. In particular, Tiree is known for its Corncrakes and has the largest population of any island in Scotland thanks to work carried out together with the crofters. In summer, the grasslands boast large numbers of breeding waders, such as Lapwing (*c.* 1,500 pairs), Dunlin, Redshank and Ringed Plover, a species that has benefited from initiatives such as providing more gravel for breeding. The same grasslands are home to internationally important numbers of wildfowl in winter. After years of decline, numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese have increased to around 900, and counts of Greenland Barnacle Geese are through the roof (more than 6,000). The grasslands also provide feeding

Plate 115. John Bowler.

opportunities for Black-tailed Godwit, with counts of 2,270, and large numbers of Icelandic Golden Plover. In amongst all these large flocks, rarities have been found, such as Long-billed Dowitcher, Ring-necked Duck and Cackling Geese. The cliffs of the west coast headland provide habitat for seabird colonies, with numbers of all species increasing over recent years. Tiree is a special place for sea watching, with a late summer count of 40,000 passing Manx Shearwater, for example.

However, the highlight of the talk had to be John's garden. Tiree is very flat, with hardly any opportunity for trees to grow, but over the years, John has managed to create some shelter, resulting in extraordinary records for Argyll, Scotland and the Western Palearctic. Imagine opening your curtains to find a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher or a Northern Parula staring back at you and not dropping your cup of tea!

Hayley Douglas

Common Scoter conservation in Scotland

Dr Alison MacLennan - Senior Conservation Officer, RSPB

Alison has worked for RSPB for the past thirty years, having been involved in a range of different contracts before taking up her current position based on the Isle of Skye. Having first worked on Common Scoter in the early 1990s, she is now RSPB's lead for this species, gaining knowledge of populations both nationally and internationally.

The Common Scoter has become such a scarce and declining breeder in Scotland that little was known about its breeding requirements here, or what targeted conservation action could help. A research programme started in 2009 to investigate their breeding ecology involving RSPB, SNH, WWT and several universities. The purpose was to identify specific conservation actions that could improve their breeding productivity.

Two different breeding areas were studied: RSPB Forsinard Reserve in the Flow Country, and the West Inverness Lochs SPA. The latter site is a string of hydro-electric dammed lochs operated by SSE. Monitoring nest success with cameras and temperature loggers demonstrated that nests are particularly vulnerable to mammalian predators, especially Fox and Pine Marten. Varying water levels in the hydro lochs impacted on nesting islands; too low, and the islands would become connected to the mainland allowing predators direct access; too high, and the islands would be swamped or submerged. These finding were used to determine and agree with SSE an optimal water level regime during the nesting season.

Although substantially different sites and habitats, a key common finding was that shallow water (less than 1.3 m depth) with large populations of larger invertebrates (more than 4 mg) are essential for duckling rearing. However, suspected competition for this prey from Trout was demonstrated by reducing Trout numbers through increased fishing effort on some Flow Country lochs.

Alison gave us an excellent and well-presented example of targeted conservation-driven research for this enigmatic seaduck.

Chris Waltho

Wednesday was quiz night. As the host, Chris Wernham welcomed around 50 delegates who Zoomed in at 7.30pm for a relaxing social evening. Participants were divided into teams of eight to test their wits in six rounds of bird and mammal-related challenges, compiled by BTO staff member and conference co-host, Steve Willis. The winning team, Where Eagles Dare, scored an impressive 57/62 points and were duly congratulated, with Chris promising a small prize to follow in the post.

The final talks session coincided with a glorious spring day across most of Scotland, prompting a few of the day's 196 participants to Zoom from their gardens. After some chat on the latest spring migrant arrivals, it was over to Ian Bainbridge to open the session and introduce the first speaker, BTO's new CEO.

Juliet's varied career in conservation science over the past 30 years spans the early days as a PhD student at Oxford University studying Dippers in south-west Scotland (where many SOC members can still recall her living in a caravan on a farm in the middle of nowhere!) to researching Brent Geese in south-east England as part of her post-doctoral work at the University of East Anglia. She first joined BTO as head of their terrestrial ecology unit, specialising on farmland birds, before moving to RSPB to focus on international conservation science.

How science underpins international conservation

Professor Juliet Vickery - Chief Executive Officer, BTO

Juliet's talk drew on her extensive knowledge from heading the RSPB's Centre for Conservation Science for the 11 years prior to taking up her current post with BTO. She began by numerating the four approaches that are followed: to prioritise the species that require conservation; to diagnose the problems and locate the regions; to find solutions, and finally, to discover if these are working.

The first example concerned fisheries around the Tristan da Cunha island group, where a marine protection zone for seabirds has now been established. The next example was to understand the declines of the Sociable Plover in Kazakhstan. Nest survival is dependent on short grass maintained by grazing cattle which, when moved to other areas, allows vegetation growth; hunting has been a major problem on passage in Turkey and Syria. The third topic

Plate 116. Juliet Vickery (highlighted in yellow frame).

concerned the Gola forest in Sierra Leone, where clearance for agriculture has reduced biodiversity. Working with local farmers, cocoa plantations have helped forest management and protection is now more effective. Juliet recommended that we buy Gola chocolate (available from the RSPB shop)! The EU birds and habitat directive was then touched upon, under which protection of species and habitats remains positive. In the final part of the talk, Juliet described how the use of diclofenac in cattle in India and Nepal had decimated vulture populations. Alternative drugs have been found and governments persuaded to take action. The response has been positive, especially in Nepal, and vulture populations are slowly recovering assisted by captive releases.

Norman Elkins

After a break, Ben Darvill introduced his BTO colleague, Chris Hewson. Chris works on the ecology and conservation of Afro-Palaearctic migratory birds and forest birds across the world, with projects primarily focussing on population changes, habitats and migration strategies of these species. The presentation was pre-recorded as sadly Chris himself was unable to attend on the day.

Tracking migratory birds to understand population declines

Dr Chris Hewson - Senior Research Ecologist, BTO

Chris described how recent tracking data can be combined with nest studies to elucidate the reasons why some bird species are doing so badly in recent years. In the last 23 years, the British breeding populations of several species have declined by 50% or more, with Turtle Dove and Wood Warbler at the head of the list. The development of satellite trackers and miniature geolocators has given some pointers to which phases of their life cycles are causing the greatest mortality for these birds. One general finding is that birds wintering in the humid zones of West and Central Africa have often suffered the greatest declines, whereas those that winter in North Africa or southern Europe tend to be maintaining their populations or even increasing. The erratic rains in the Sahel region can lead to good and bad years for species wintering there. Geolocators weighing only 0.35 g can be used on birds as small as Wood Warblers and Spotted Flycatchers to show migration routes and the main stop-over areas where they feed up or spend prolonged periods during the winter. However, the need to re-trap birds to recover the geolocators is a problem, with Wood Warblers rarely faithful to their breeding sites.

Roger Hissett

Thanks to some swift action and technical prowess following a sudden power cut at home, Steve Willis managed to re-join the meeting from his mobile phone in time to introduce the day's final speaker - his former birding buddy and expert patch birder, Mark Lewis. By day, Mark is a seabird ecologist with JNCC based in Aberdeen; outside office hours, he can most likely be found at his local patch on the south side of Aberdeen harbour.

Patch birding, sound recording and noc-mig - how sound recording helped me learn about the birds on my patch

Mark Lewis - Seabird ecologist, JNCC

Mark introduced us to his patch at Girdle Ness, where he can walk from home and visit several habitats including the harbour, coast, sewage works, a small lake and the urban area. He has birded this patch for twelve years and sees around 150 species per year there. His interest in sound recording blossomed after reading the book *The Sound Approach to Birding*. He initially felt that recording songs and calls would help him become a better field birder.

Mark explained what a sonogram is and went through a few of the many species that he has recorded including Siberian Chiffchaff. This resulted in a paper in *British Birds*. Monitoring nocturnal migration has given Mark an insight into what species are passing over during the night, even at so-called dead times of the year. Particularly interesting was the analysis of the range of Starling mimicry. This has thrown up many new questions for Mark, such as how far back a Starling's memory for sounds stretches.

Plate 117. Conference participants.

Finally, he discussed the equipment required for anyone interested in recording, plus advice on resources for analysing songs and calls, such as the excellent www.xeno-canto.org or www.macaulaylibrary.org

Mark concluded that bird sounds make him happy and have improved his mental health; sound recording makes him a better listener, enhancing the enjoyment, knowledge and understanding of his local patch even after years of birding there. It has both answered questions about the birds at the site and raised other questions and potential issues that need further research, for example, terns and scoter migrating overland at night in the vicinity of windfarms. Meanwhile, an engaged audience had their own questions, to the tune of 48 of them posted in the Chat!

For more information on bird sound recording, see *Scottish Birds* 40(4): 318–324.

Yvonne Benting

Summing up, Chris Wernham recalled how we had been treated to excellent talks over two weekends, from rigorous diagnostic science to the birding delights of Tiree and the fascinating world of recording bird sounds. Chris and Ian closed the conference by thanking all involved: the speakers for sharing their insights and expertise, and those behind the scenes, including Ben and Steve for brilliant work on the technical front. Chris finished by acknowledging how difficult a year it has been and expressing sympathy to anyone who has lost loved ones during this challenging period. Chris noted that it had been a tough year for BTO and SOC too, but thanks to their dedicated supporters, both our organisations have managed to weather the financial challenges of the COVID-19 storm. The final thanks went to all the attendees for supporting this year's virtual event and they were wished a joyful spring birding.

NEWS AND NOTICES

New Members:

Ayrshire: Mr J. Blane, Mr I. Johnstone, Mrs T. Taggart, **Borders:** Mrs K. Buchanan, Mr D. Lewis, Mr A. Pearson, Mr A. Reid, **Central Scotland:** Prof A. Kendrick, Mr & Mrs J. McNally, Mr R. Moir, Mr G. Murray, Mr & Mrs D. Musk, Mr & Mrs J. Schulga, Ms D. Thompson, **Clyde:** Mr M. Comerford, Mr J. Duncan, Mr D. Flenley, Mr L. Flynn, Mr A. Geary, Mr B. Jarvie, Mr A. MacKenzie, Ms L. Murison, Mr K. Ramsay, Mr G. Sibbet, Mr & Mrs N. Webb, **Dumfries:** Miss S. Clifford, Mr C. Kinnear, Mr F. Marshall, Miss K. McHugh, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr R. Forster, Mr T. Stewart, Dr T. Walentowicz & Ms C. Smith, **Fife:** Mr & Mrs G. Balfour, Mrs J. McWhinnie, Miss C. Moran, Miss S. Wood, **Highland:** Mr D. Arnot, Dr S. Crutchfield, Mr P. Johnston, Mr P. Moore, Mrs A. Morris, Mr D. Nisbet, Mr I. Plumtree, Mr M. Watts, Miss L. Welbourn, **Lothian:** Mrs H. Anderson, Ms S. Bennett, Miss G. Brodie, Mr & Mrs J. Buchanan, Mr & Mrs M. Chick, Mr S. Cockburn, Ms L. Deutsch, Mr R. Dick & family, Mr I. Ferguson, Mr C.L. Furby, Mr M. Garden, Mr A. Gordon, Miss K. Grant, Miss V. Hastie, Miss V. Housden & Miss T. Lay, Mr J. Killorn, Mr C. McAulay, Ms F. McAuliffe, Ms C. McCusker, Mrs E. McKirdy, Ms J. McLaren & Mr G. Kappler, Mr & Mrs C. Monk & family, Mr B. O'Dowd, Ms F. O'May, Mr J. & Mr H. Panton, Mr D. Paris, Mr N. Patton, Mr C. Robertson, Mr M. Roman, Mr A. Russell, Ms A. Saunders, Mr & Mrs A. Stevenson, Mr & Mrs J. Todd, Mrs P.M.M. Ward, Mr S. Watts, Mrs R. Young, **North-East Scotland:** Dr S. Johnson, Dr R. Macdonald, Mr R. Murray, Ms C. Smith, Miss L. Warren, **Stewartry:** Prof & Mrs G. Houlsby, **Tayside:** Mr M. Borthwick, Mr J. Pattullo, Ms P. Richardson, Mr G. Ventress, **West Galloway:** Mrs R. Davies.

SOC Annual Conference & AGM, 19–21 November 2021, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

A provisional booking has been made with the Atholl Palace in the hope that we will be able to proceed with a face-to-face conference. To allow time for more certainty, the circulation of programme and booking information, usually enclosed with this issue, will be postponed until September.

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference, 19 March 2022, Moray

We look forward to hosting the next spring conference in Elgin. Programme and booking information will be enclosed with the December issue of *Scottish Birds* and circulated by email.

Membership subscription rates

SOC Council agreed previously that the Finance Committee would review membership subscription rates every two years - a necessary exercise to ensure that income is covering our basic operational costs. The last review was in 2019 when the decision was made to leave rates at the level set in 2017.

Despite costs having risen substantially over the past four years, while membership fees have remained frozen, the Committee agreed at its last biennial review (February 2021) that it would be inappropriate to increase subscription fees in a year when some members may have experienced financial hardship as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, the COVID-19 restrictions meant that we were unable to deliver our full suite of membership benefits, such as indoor meetings, conferences and field trips. As such, a full review will be carried forward to spring 2022, which will likely require an uplift in subscription rates. The Committee will also take the opportunity to review the various membership categories.

Council is grateful to all members for their continued support during this past year.

Andrew Thorpe, Honorary Treasurer

Waterston House update

Opening Hours

Thursday–Sunday 10:00 hrs–17:00 hrs

Staff can still be reached Monday to Friday between 09:00 hrs and 17:00 hrs. If calling outside of Waterston House opening hours, a recorded message on the office telephone (01875 871330) will direct your call. Or you can email your enquiry to mail@the-soc.org.uk

Please check the SOC website for any updates to these opening hours, as well as COVID-19 safety measures in place and the availability of facilities.

Art exhibitions

Insectarium 3 June–25 July. A selection of artworks on the theme of Insects by around 50 artists, members of the Society of Scottish Artists, including paintings, drawings, fine art prints, sculptures and small installations (an installation aims to generate an idea or experience in the viewer).

Song Lines 29 July–1 August (one week only!). An exhibition of prints/collages created by Val O' Regan in response to the SOC sound archive.

Painted Wings 5 August–26 September. A joint exhibition by three watercolour specialists: Helga Chart, Claire Harkess and Derek Robertson.

Wonder Wander 3 June–26 September. The first extensive exhibition of outdoor sculptures in our garden, created by Andrea Geile and inspired by the coastal landscape and wildlife.

Plate 118. Wonder Wander, 'Flit and Away' by *Andrea Geile*

Make your shopping count without spending a penny extra

With the doors to Waterston House closed for much of the past twelve months, the Club is looking at ways to raise funds for the Charity and has registered with easyfundraising.

Easyfundraising turns your everyday online shop into donations for the SOC, at no extra cost to you, or to the Charity. You can raise money each time you shop online at over 4,600 retailers, whether you're buying your weekly groceries, your car insurance or your business supplies. Once you're registered (which is totally free) with the scheme and have nominated the SOC as your chosen cause, every time you shop through the easyfundraising platform, the Club receives a small donation.

To get started, simply register (just your name and email address) with the site at www.easyfundraising.org.uk, or alternatively, search for our cause ('Scottish Ornithologists' Club') on their website. To find out more about how the scheme works visit www.the-soc.org.uk/content/support-us/easyfundraising

Thank you for considering this additional way of supporting the Club.

Branch updates

Branch talks and outings

The winter programme of branch talks delivered via online video conferencing (Zoom), while hardly as satisfactory as meeting friends face-to-face, proved successful in terms of smooth-running and uptake, with good attendance numbers, in some cases exceeding numbers that would normally attend a physical meeting (over 100 for Lothian branch's January talk!) and members from further afield able to participate. In light of the prevailing uncertainty at the time of writing regarding indoor gatherings, a decision was made to continue with a virtual-only programme when talks resume in September and until the end of 2021 (see enclosed programme). Some branches may decide to supplement the virtual programme with physical meetings, if circumstances allow. Any changes or additions to the programme enclosed will be published on the SOC website on the relevant branch pages and notices emailed to members.

As restrictions on small-scale outdoor events are due to be eased towards the end of May, many branches will be looking to resume a programme of excursions from the summer onwards. Again, details will be posted on the SOC website and circulated to members by email.

Sign up for branch activity email notices

If you do not already receive our email communications and wish to receive notices of branch talks and/or outings, please complete the short sign-up form on the SOC website: https://www.the-soc.org.uk/gdpr-consent or you can email Kathryn Cox to check or update your mailing list preferences: admin@the-soc.org.uk

No email? Contact your branch Secretary

For members who do not have access to the internet to be able to check the SOC website or receive the email notices, please call your local branch Secretary to check for details of any outings that may be running.

Clyde area bird news now on Twitter

Did you know that bird news for the region (visit the Club's website for a definition of the area covered) can now be found by visiting @Clydebirding on Twitter (www.twitter.com/Clydebirding). You don't need a Twitter account to view the page. Run by members of the local branch, the account is a new, fantastic and regularly updated resource. If you're birdwatching in the region (assuming COVID-19 restrictions allow it) and have sightings to pass on, such as the arrival of Pied Flycatcher (Plate 119), please tag @Clydebirding in your tweet.

Lothian, change of Secretary

David Parmee, 21 Redhall House Drive, Edinburgh, EH14 1JE, tel 07769 704821, email lothiansecretary@the-soc.org.uk. Council thanks outgoing Secretary Alison Creamer for her work steering the branch over the past two years.

Ian Andrews steps down as Coordinating Editor of *Scottish Birds*

Ian's history with SOC publications dates back to the 1980s when he helped Stan da Prato with the production of the Club's then newsletter, *Scottish Bird News* - cutting and pasting articles on bits of paper to lay out the pages!

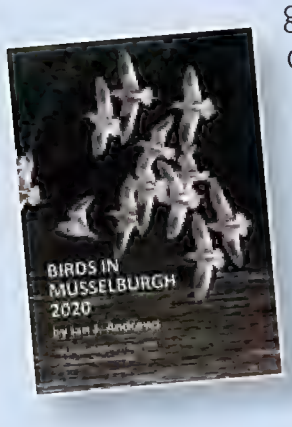
As one of the lead editors of the SOC's celebrated two-volume book, *The Birds of Scotland* (2007), Ian was an obvious person to approach for help with the revamp of *Scottish Birds* (2009). Ian kindly agreed to step in as Acting Coordinator, to lead the editorial team

Plate 119. Pied Flycatcher at RSPB Inversnaid, Clyde, 2 May 2013. © *Ian Fulton*

Plate 120. Piper Weston enjoying another issue of *Scottish Birds*, January 2020. © *Jenny Weston*

through the relaunch until a permanent Coordinator was found. Little did he know that almost 12 years on, he would still be in the role!

Council is deeply grateful to Ian for the vital role he has played in steering the production of the journal during this time. It is thanks to his dedication and the continued hard work of the editorial team as a whole that we have such an outstanding publication, which serves as a vital record of Scottish ornithology. Although Ian steps down from his Coordinating role, we are grateful that he will continue to offer his map and graph production skills whenever required. His latest publication, *Birds in Musselburgh 2020*, is freely available to download from www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/local-recorders-network/areas/lothian



Welcome to new *Scottish Birds* editorial team members

Council is grateful to everyone who expressed an interest in the vacancies on the team. We had several candidates with particularly strong editorial skills who now join Harry, Stan, and Stuart to complete the core team: Prof Andrew Barker assumes the lead editor position for the Club Articles, News & Views section; Mark Wilkinson joins the Birding Articles editors; Ed Austin, Dr John Frank and Bridget Khursheed are on board as proof readers; and former staff member Jean Torrance has kindly agreed to take on the role of Indexer. We still have vacancies on the team for regional correspondents, and details can be found on the SOC website: https://www.the-soc.org.uk/news/scottish-birds-editorial-team or by contacting Wendy at mail@the-soc.org.uk

The Birds of Scotland (BS3) Fund

The BS3 Fund Committee is pleased to announce the following grants approved in the period from autumn 2020 to date to support ornithological publications:

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, 2nd instalment of a three-year pledge to support publication costs of the *Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme Annual Report* (£1,750)

North Sea Bird Club, to support publication of the *Club History and 40 Year Anniversary Final Report* (£5,116)

Dr Ron Summers, to support publication costs of the monograph book on the *Purple Sandpiper* (£4,000)

Information on the Fund and the application process is available on the SOC website: www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/publications/the-birds-of-scotland-fund

Co-Chairs Bob McGowan & Chris McInerny

NEW! SOC Birdwatching for Beginners Facebook group

Partly prompted by the prevailing lockdown not permitting us to run our usual guided walks for beginners, led by Scott Paterson, we launched this closed (private) group on Facebook (FB) in early spring. The group is designed to support anyone just getting

Plate 121. New SOC Facebook group provides a platform for beginner birdwatchers. © *Samuel Hood*

started; it's a space for bird enthusiasts to share their observations and post their bird ID or behaviour queries. To join the group, either as a beginner keen to develop your bird knowledge or as a seasoned birder happy to help with queries and share your expertise, visit https://www.facebook.com/groups/socbirdwatchingforbeginners or simply search for 'SOC Birdwatching for Beginners' on FB.

North-East Scotland Bird Report

The 2019 report is now available at a cost of £12.00 inc. p&p. For further details, please contact Ian Middleton (tel: 07882 411469) or visit: www.nescotlandbirdreport.org.uk

Lothian Bird Report

The 2018 report is now available and costs £10.00. Subject to Covid restrictions, it is available from SOC HQ at Waterston House or Viking Optical Centre, 101 Rose Street, Edinburgh.

Scottish Birds Records Committee - seeking a new member for the committee

The Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) is seeking a new member to replace Mark Wilkinson, who retires later this year. To maintain geographical representation across the country SBRC would prefer a candidate from southern areas of Scotland. Any potential candidates should send their name to the Secretary (Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk). If more than one name is put forward, a ballot will be instigated, with Local Recorders having one vote each.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC

'Boxes for Barnies' - SOC Clyde Branch

A new initiative by the Club's Clyde Branch to create nest boxes for breeding Barn Owls in the Lochwinnoch area has taken flight, and with it hopes of boosting the species' recovery in the region.

Barn Owls, our much-loved bird of the countryside, have seen a welcome increase in numbers after a population low in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the major factors for the species' upturn in fortune has been an increase in nesting sites thanks to the

provision of artificial nest boxes. These have helped to counter the loss of nest sites in barns and old farm building lost due to conversion and modernisation of the structures. Thankfully, Barn Owls adapt well to breeding in nest boxes, and according to the British Trust for Ornithology it is likely that a significant proportion of the breeding population, thought to exceed one in four birds, now uses them for breeding.

The Lochwinnoch 'Boxes for Barnies' project has seen the construction of 19 purpose-built Barn Owl boxes, supported by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and funded by the branch and Garnock Connections Landscape Partnership, www.garnockconnections.org.uk. These have been installed at suitable locations in Renfrewshire, a priority area for the species.

Clyde Branch members work closely with the Lochwinnoch community who have helped with the construction, installation and ongoing monitoring of the boxes and this will continue (under licence) throughout the breeding season. The records generated from monitoring the boxes will be entered on BirdTrack.

Plate 122. Boxes for Barnies Project Volunteer Fraser Kennedy constructing a Barn Owl nest box, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 22 December2020. © *Zul Bhatia*

If you're interested in finding out more about the initiative, please contact Zul Bhatia, Project Lead, at: zulbhatia1@gmail.com

Jane Allison, SOC Development Officer &
Zul Bhatia, Clyde Branch Chair

Plate 123. Project Volunteer Fraser Kennedy's children Noah and Orla Kennedy try out the Barn Owl nest box for size, Lochwinnoch, Clyde, 27 December 2020. © *Fraser Kennedy*

OBITUARIES

Gwyneth Daphne Peirse-Duncombe (1929–2021)

Daphne Greenwood was born in India, where her Canadian father was serving with the British Army. She did not reach the UK until the age of three. In 1940, her mother took Daphne and two cousins to Victoria BC where she went to school. They returned to the UK in 1944, to be reunited with her father. After the war the family moved to Edinburgh, where she trained as a physiotherapist at The Royal Infirmary. When Harold Greenwood inherited an aunt's house in Hampshire, the family moved once again. Here one Christmas, aged 22, she met Alastair Wilson (he took the name Peirse-Duncombe in 1968 for family reasons). They married in 1953, and Daphne became an army wife with the frequent changes of house that entailed. After Alastair retired from the army in 1961, the family moved to Glasgow to a large, and largely unheated, Victorian house where Daphne had to bring up three small children in a home with no mod cons. In 1969, a further move took them to Edinburgh and Daphne returned to her work as a physio, mainly in out-patient clinics in Edinburgh and later in the Borders.

Plate 124. Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Easter Ross 2018. © *Family Photo*

The couple's love of the outdoors included bird-watching, which grew over time through their association with the Scottish Ornithologists' Club. This began in 1969, when Alastair took over from Irene Waterston as club secretary. When George and Irene moved out to East Lothian in 1973, Daphne and Alastair moved into the flat above the club's premises at 21 Regent Terrace in Edinburgh. Until 1983, when Alastair retired due to heart problems, Regent Terrace was indeed a centre, not just for ornithology but ornithologists, as so many visitors enjoyed the warm hospitality that Daphne provided. They thoroughly enjoyed attending SOC branch meetings throughout Scotland, and a highlight of the year was meeting up with old friends at the annual conference.

Not surprisingly, when Daphne and Alastair moved down to Gattonside near Melrose, they were both elected Honorary Members of the Club. They helped set up the Borders Branch of SOC and started the 200 Club which Daphne continued after Alastair's death in 2002, helped on the accounting side by fellow Borders branch member Vicky McLellan. The 200 Club ran for 28 years until Daphne retired in 2017, having raised £66,000. Prizes amounting to £1,000 each year were won by members who had each contributed £12. Another £1,000 went to club funds, meaning that all sorts of equipment, fittings and furnishings could be acquired for SOC premises.

Daphne was a very keen gardener, and they chose Rosebank Cottage for their retirement because of its garden. She opened the garden for charity, with others in the village, under the Yellow Book Scheme. Latterly, she had to reduce her activities because of failing eyesight, about which she never complained. She was devoted to her children: Sue, Peter and Richard and their spouses, her grandchildren Laura, David and Josey, and great-grandchild Poppy. We extend our sympathy to them all, and record our appreciation of all that Daphne did for the Scottish Ornithologists' Club.

Compiled by friends and family

Willie Prest (1938–2021)

Willie was born in Moffat, Dumfriesshire, where he grew up. He was interested in birds from an early age, watching Peregrines with Willie Murray near home and spending time with Ian Newton on his Sparrowhawk studies. Involvement with the SOC started with membership of the Dumfries branch in 1966. After working for Annandale Estates, he joined the Forestry Commission in admin and finance, moving in 1973 to Inverness and joining the local SOC Branch. His wife Ann and their two young sons joined him in 1974. From the outset Willie was very active in the Club, becoming Branch Secretary. He was a regular on branch outings, some of which he organised, especially where the Forestry Commission was concerned, such as trips to a Blackcock lek. At another site, Club members had the pleasure of viewing at close range an exceptionally aggressive cock Capercaillie. In the early days of the Highland Ringing Group, he assisted with fieldwork on species such as Slavonian Grebes and various raptors, and he was involved in ringing Storm Petrels on Priest Island. He was particularly interested in the Hen Harrier, which at that time was making an encouraging increase in the area; short lived as it turned out, unfortunately. Although Willie's stay in the Highlands was relatively short, he had many happy memories and made lifelong friends.

In 1977, Willie moved to Edinburgh in a senior role in the Finance Division of the Forestry Commission. He was very dedicated to his work, well respected, and known as a straight talker. At the same time, he was very encouraging and supportive, and his laugh could be heard down the corridors. He took a genuine interest in people and was curious about everything. For over 20 years, Willie undertook the WeBS count at Blackness in West Lothian, in the early years with his son Graeme, who is also a birder, and later with Ann. He became chairman of the Lothian branch of the SOC, served on the Club's management committee, and was on Council from 1984–1987. He also served on the Creative Executive, which looked at increasing membership and other areas of Club development. He helped compile a comprehensive guide to leaving a legacy to the SOC.

Plate 125. Willie Prest birding in Cyprus. © *Ann Prest*

In retirement, Willie did a huge variety of voluntary work for the SOC, taking a keen interest in Waterston House, the art exhibitions and their promotion. He travelled widely with Ann and birding friends, visiting countries like Namibia, India, Jordan and USA. For many years, he went birding every Tuesday with Ken Mackenzie and Mike Ashley. Other birders were always pleased to see the trio with their friendly banter and sense of fun. Dave Allan, another close friend, christened them 'Last of the Summer Wine' - a title they subsequently adopted. Willie is survived by his wife Ann, his sons Graeme and Donald, and grandchildren.

Compiled by his friends and family

Dougal Andrew

Sadly, we have to announce that Dougal Andrew, one of the club's longest-serving and most supportive members, passed away on 28 March. A full appreciation of his considerable contribution to the SOC will appear in September's *Scottish Birds*.

Observations of breeding Water Rails at Shiel Knowe Pond, Lothian, in 2020

Shiel Knowe Pond (NT353588) is near North Middleton, Lothian, and lies at an altitude of *c.* 200 m asl. Comprising open water and vegetation, it has a total area of *c.* 1.4 ha. Marginal and marshy vegetation has progressively colonised the site since 1997. It is fed by a spring which is visible only when the water level is very low. Open water now comprises *c.* 20% at its most extensive, but fluctuates seasonally and in response to precipitation levels.

In 2020, Water Rail bred at the site. TS heard adults on 17 occasions and saw birds on three of these dates. Adults were twice recorded with young. Chicks were seen on six occasions and juveniles on seven. NM saw rails on seven out of ten visits, but an adult bird on only one. The combined observations from both observers are presented in Figure 1.

Those birds which were only heard were all in extensive areas of marsh vegetation. All the sightings were of birds between marginal vegetation and the water's edge on a muddy margin *c.* 0.5 m wide, apart from one sighting of a chick which ranged up to 3 m from cover on an extensive area of mud when the water level was very low. All chicks recorded were foraging except for one which was following an adult on 21 July (the earliest recorded). Two adults were seen chasing each other on 16 July. The water level was high on seven of the occasions when no rails were seen and very windy on another. However, juveniles were seen on two occasions with high water levels, and no Water Rails were seen on one occasion when the water level was low.

The number of sightings of adults and juveniles is unusual. Those of chicks are especially

Plate 126. Juvenile Water Rail, Shiel Knowe Pond, Lothian, 16 August 2020. © *Bruce Kerr*

Plate 127. Juvenile Water Rail, Shiel Knowe Pond, Lothian, 29 July 2020. © *Norman Milligan*

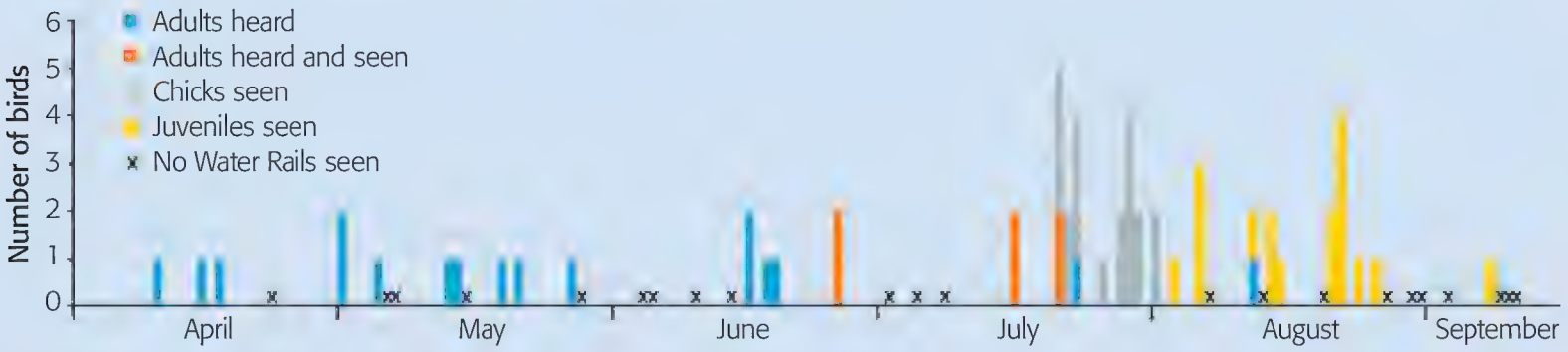


Figure 1. Number of birds. (*Figure prepared by Ian Andrews*)

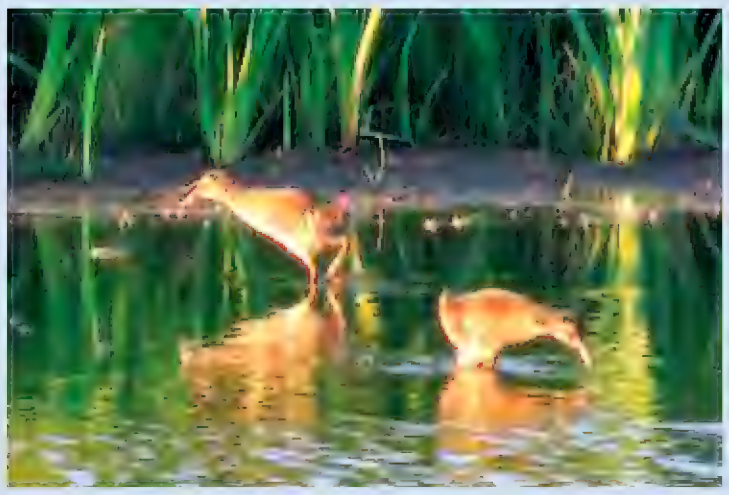


Plate 128. Juvenile Water Rail, Shiel Knowe Pond, Lothian, 6 August 2020. © *Norman Milligan*

noteworthy. Between 2008–13, Water Rails were rarely seen in the breeding season in Lothian. Confirmed breeding records were rare, and all were of chicks or fledged young (Murray *et al*. 2019). Between 1988 and 1994, sightings of birds were very rare, with sightings of young rarer still (Murray *et al.* 1998). At the 15 breeding sites noted from 2014–2018, young were only seen at two (on three dates) and juveniles at two (on two dates) (*Lothian Bird Report.* 2014–2018).

There are no published breeding records from this part of Lothian, the nearest being one of probable breeding at Gladhouse Reservoir *c.* 7 km away (Murray *et al.* 1998).

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Trevor Smith, Norman Milligan & Bruce Kerr

Native species dependent on introduced species: the example of Siskins and Sitka Spruce

About 6,000 years ago, much of northern Britain was covered by the Scots Pines of the Caledonian Forest. Several animals must then have depended on Scots Pine seeds as a major food supply, including Red Squirrels, crossbills, and Siskins. With the decline in the area of forest, the geographical distribution of these species would have contracted. According to historical records, the Siskin was a very localised and extremely scarce breeder in England and Wales in the 19th century, and in Scotland was mainly found in Inverness-shire and Perthshire, coincident with the main remnants of the Scots Pine component of the Caledonian Forest (Holloway 1996). It did not breed at all in west Scotland. The establishment of plantation forestry with non-native conifer species, including larches but especially Sitka Spruce, changed all that. The breeding range and numbers of Siskins in Scotland have increased dramatically, with up to an estimated 3.5 million breeding pairs in Scotland in the 2000s, almost all in mature conifer plantations (Forrester *et al.* 2007). The BTO Atlas surveys show a 166% increase in the number of occupied 10 km squares between 1970 and 2009 (Balmer *et al.* 2013). Argyll, where no Siskins bred in the 19th century, is now one of the strongholds of the species, because of the large area of mature Sitka Spruce plantation forestry.

Siskins are lovely birds, and it is great to see them and hear their spring song. They are also a popular feature of garden bird feeders in late winter and spring, and in Scotland also now increasingly through the breeding season. But does this huge increase in Siskin numbers, made possible by the non-native Sitka Spruce, have consequences for other wildlife? Sitka Spruce is a masting species, producing large crops of cones in occasional years, and very few cones in intervening years (with production by

Plate 129. Female Siskin, Tarbet, Clyde, 3 April 2021. © *Photos by Bob Furness*

Norway Spruce showing a strong correlation with Sitka Spruce). Years of high spruce cone crop are synchronous throughout Britain, creating a 'boom and bust' foraging situation for spruce seed-dependent wildlife such as Siskins. Siskins switch from feeding on cone seeds during dry weather to alternative foods during wet weather, because they can only extract seeds from cones when the cones are open (Furness and Furness 2021). Unlike Red Squirrels and crossbills, Siskins can't extract seeds from cones when they close in damp conditions. But the strongest influence is the magnitude of cone crop; timing of breeding and Siskin productivity are strongly influenced by the size of the Sitka Spruce cone crop in each year (Furness and Furness 2021).

This effect was shown locally, but also nationally as, according to BTO data, the proportion of juvenile Siskins ringed each year throughout Britain and Ireland was significantly higher in years with a larger Sitka Spruce cone crop. Stable isotopes of carbon and nitrogen in feathers of fledglings show that Siskin chicks are fed predominantly on seeds in years of high cone crop, whereas other small passerines are fed at a higher average trophic level. But Siskin diet becomes more similar to that of other small passerines (Chaffinches, Robins, tits, etc.) in years with a poor cone crop. In those years, Siskins feed chicks a diet from a higher trophic level, and so presumably compete more with other birds for caterpillars, spiders, beetles and flies. But isotopes in feathers of these other passerines also shift slightly between years of high and low cone crop, suggesting that they may be forced to adjust their diet when confronted with large numbers of Siskins that don't have cones available to them (Furness and Furness 2021). Siskin populations may be influenced by the effects of plantation forestry management and, if rainfall patterns affect masting patterns or how much cones open and close, climate change. Greater species diversity in forestry might mitigate the masting effects of Sitka Spruce; moves towards more open plantations with some larger trees may result in a net increase in Sitka Spruce cone abundance in high cone crop years because older and larger trees produce far more cones than small trees, potentially further increasing the boom and bust seed economy. Plantation forestry may have given a huge boost to populations of wildlife that can exploit seeds from cones, but that increase may also have effects on other wildlife species, especially in the lean years of low Sitka Spruce cone crop, and those effects will likely continue to change in future, depending on land-use policy.

Plate 130. Male Siskin, Tarbet, Clyde, 3 April 2021.

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Bob Furness

Plate 131. Drake Mallard x Pintail, River Tweed, Borders, 12 February 2021. © *Photos by Alistair Cutter*

Mallard x Pintail hybrid on the River Tweed

On 8 February, when most of the land was covered with several inches of snow and all the freshwater ponds were frozen, I discovered a drake Mallard x Pintail hybrid among *c.* 50 Mallards swimming close to the bank of the River Tweed just east of St Boswells (Borders). The bird showed many Mallard characteristics, e.g. metallic green head, as well as others reminiscent of Pintail, e.g. dark grey bill, long upturned tail. The breast was pale chestnut, compared with the purplish-brown of the Mallard and the clean white of the Pintail. The bird was observed until 17 February, after which date the river level had risen substantially.

Plate 132. Drake Mallard x Pintail, River Tweed, Borders, 8 February 2021.

Waterfowl hybridize more often than any other group of birds. Mallard x Pintail hybrids most often occur in North America but are relatively rare this side of the Atlantic. Even if trans-Atlantic vagrancy is ruled out, and assuming it has not escaped from a wildfowl collection, this bird's provenance remains intriguing. The Scottish strongholds for breeding Pintail are in Argyll and Orkney. However, there was confirmed breeding of Pintail in Borders at Yetholm Loch in 2008. Birds were also observed on the Tweed at Sprouston just east of Kelso in May 2011 and at Whitrig Bog near Bemersyde Moss in April 2012, approximately 4 km north of this sighting (*South East Scotland Atlas* 2007–13). Conceivably, this bird originated locally.

Alistair Cutter

Plate 133. Birds feeding on Newmains Farm, Borders, 26 February 2021. © *Photos by David Graham*

Feeding seed-eating birds on Newmains Farm in the Borders

Newmains is a mixed farm by Reston in the eastern Borders totalling 87.5 ha. Normally, about half the farm is sown with spring barley and the remainder grass for hay and haylage. I usually have over two hectares of bird cover consisting of Triticale, Linseed, Quinoa, Sunflower, Millet and Phacelia. Over the past 20 years or so, I have been putting out additional food down a sheltered track next to one of the bird cover crops. I have been systematically counting birds feeding here for the past ten years. I put out bruised barley every morning starting in October and feed through the winter and into at least late May, sometimes June. When I first start feeding in October, I put out about 2 kg of barley until the birds start coming to the food. After a couple of weeks, I start giving them a bit more when they are cleaning it all up. They usually eat about ten kg a day through most of the winter. In hard weather, especially with snow cover, they can eat over 20 kg a day. I start cutting down feed from mid-April

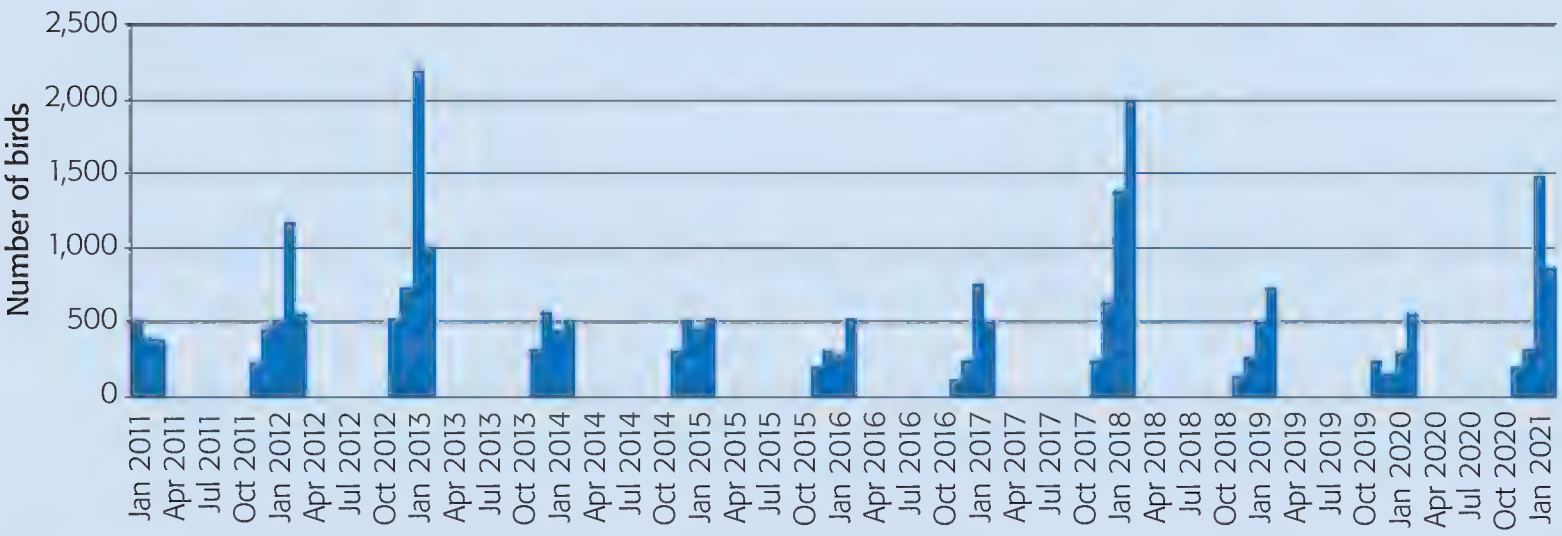


Figure 1. Counts of feeding birds. (*Figure prepared by Ian Andrews*)

Table 1. Numbers of individual species.

Date	Skylark	Blackbird	Song Thrush	House Sparrow	Tree Sparrow	Chaffinch	Brambling	Greenfinch	Linnet	Mealy Redpoll	Lesser Redpoll	Goldfinch	Yellowhammer	Reed Bunting
10 January 2011	-	26	-	70	240	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	120	60
8 February 2011	-	32	-	47	190	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	95	34
3 March 2011	-	27	-	43	210	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	83	25
13 November 2011	-	19	-	60	120	32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
28 December 2011	-	31	-	64	220	60	-	-	-	-	-	-	70	18
31 January 2012	-	24	-	50	250	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	180	16
7 February 2012	-	42	-	42	290	90	-	-	-	-	-	-	650	60
9 March 2012	-	45	-	35	220	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	240	32
4 November 2012	-	18	-	40	120	-	-	-	300	-	-	-	30	21
4 December 2012	-	35	-	35	170	30	8	-	400	-	-	-	40	23
22 January 2013	-	34	-	60	250	150	1085	-	-	-	-	-	500	120
1 February 2013	-	38	-	30	240	60	440	-	-	-	-	-	180	25
29 November 2013	-	15	-	32	80	-	-	-	180	-	-	-	25	-
27 December 2013	-	32	-	50	170	-	2	-	280	-	-	-	45	-
28 January 2014	-	26	-	36	110	-	-	-	210	-	-	-	40	24
26 February 2014	-	38	-	42	210	-	-	-	120	-	-	-	85	24
26 November 2014	-	18	-	32	70	-	-	-	170	-	-	-	23	11
24 December 2014	-	27	-	40	190	-	-	-	220	-	-	-	34	15
16 January 2015	-	34	-	51	240	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	110	24
27 February 2015	-	37	-	65	270	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	120	42
24 November 2015	-	14	-	34	95	-	-	-	-	-	37	-	21	12
21 December 2015	-	22	-	44	134	-	-	-	-	-	65	-	32	18
22 January 2016	-	25	-	26	140	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	70	24
15 February 2016	-	21	-	42	190	-	11	-	-	8	144	-	94	18
29 November 2016	-	18	-	28	56	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	9
20 December 2016	-	25	-	34	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	45	26
27 January 2017	-	32	-	39	260	40	2	-	-	-	-	-	320	70
12 February 2017	-	38	-	31	180	54	-	-	-	-	-	-	165	42
27 November 2017	-	14	-	36	95	31	-	-	-	-	-	35	26	14
29 December 2017	-	34	-	45	190	80	-	-	-	-	14	22	240	28
17 January 2018	130	36	-	43	320	170	-	-	60	-	25	60	440	110
28 February 2018	80	42	6	60	380	-	60	24	200	-	120	90	700	240
23 November 2018	-	14	-	34	75	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	5
4 December 2018	-	23	-	45	170	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	8
28 January 2019	-	31	-	39	220	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	170	45
2 February 2019	-	38	-	31	230	-	-	20	-	-	-	35	340	47
21 November 2019	-	16	-	30	56	-	-	-	130	-	-	-	12	7
30 December 2019	-	21	-	24	80	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	36	12
23 January 2020	-	53	-	34	135	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	76	13
20 February 2020	-	62	-	37	210	-	-	-	130	-	-	-	98	25
27 November 2020	-	49	-	32	45	-	-	-	-	-	-	53	21	14
28 December 2020	-	43	-	24	90	-	-	-	30	-	-	60	26	56
1 January 2021	410	46	-	54	260	60	24	-	380	-	-	70	110	73
10 February 2021	-	65	-	61	210	40	-	-	-	-	-	25	380	95

depending on weather to about 5 kg a day. As long as birds keep coming, I put food out. In the breeding season it gives the adults a quick extra fill while feeding young. The bird cover crops get big numbers of birds feeding as well. Numbers usually start building up from September onwards. The most numerous species are shown in Table 1, with total numbers of these birds in Figure 1. Linnets are usually the first birds to appear, feeding on Millet and Linseed; Goldfinch like these as well as Sunflower seeds. There are usually a lot of weeds among the cover crops. This year, I had big numbers of Lesser Redpoll feeding mainly on Rapeseed and Runches. I always leave about 16 ha of stubble throughout the winter before ploughing in

Plate 134. Redpolls, Newmains Farm, Borders, 26 January 2014.

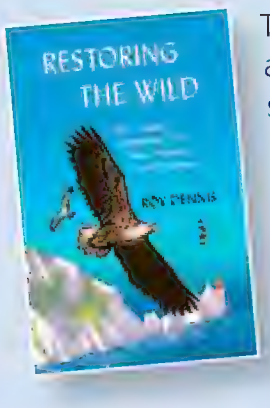
March. This usually holds good numbers of wintering Skylark and Reed Bunting. Skylarks only use bird cover when snow covers the stubble fields. They start coming in small numbers to barley as well in the hardest weather. When I get big flocks of birds feeding in the bird cover these attract raptors. I have recorded Hen Harrier and Merlin occasionally, and Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel frequently. I have also seen Long-eared Owl on a few occasions. In hard weather, large numbers of Rooks try to feed in the bird cover, mainly on the Triticale which they can clear in a short time. Woodpigeons can be a problem at times on the bruised barley, mainly in hard weather. Of the species in Table 1, the high numbers of Linnet, Lesser Redpoll, Yellowhammer and both sparrows are noteworthy, since these are all red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern. As well as the birds shown in Table 1, I get smaller numbers of Dunnock, Robin, Bullfinch, Starling, Collared Dove, Grey Partridge and Pheasants feeding on the bruised barley. I have even had the odd rarity feeding here, including a Little Bunting that wintered in 1995, a couple of Turtle Doves over the years, and a Great Grey Shrike that was attracted by the feeding birds.

David Graham

BOOK REVIEWS

The book reviews published in *Scottish Birds* reflect the views of the named reviewers and not those of the SOC. Compiled by Nick Picozzi.

Restoring the Wild. Sixty Years of Wilding our Skies, Woods and Waterways. Roy Dennis, 2021. Collins, London, ISBN 978-0-00-836881-4, 452 pages, hardback, £18.99.



This is a very readable account of what the subtitle describes as sixty years of wilding our skies, woods and waterways. The book is organised into 11 chapters, the headings of which convey the flavour of the book and the author's 'let's do It' philosophy, for example risk-taking, global vision, charisma, bureaucracy, optimism. Roy has always been eager to push on when others urged caution, but he and his many supporters would say he has generally been right. He covers ten species of birds, some such as White-tailed Eagle now reintro-duced to the British Isles after a long historical absence. The range of others such as Golden Eagle, Red Kite and Osprey have been increased by some relocation from healthy populations. Eagle Owl is the most controversial as it is not currently accepted on the British List as a native species. Of the seven species of mammal considered, only Red Squirrel, Beaver, Wild Boar and semi-wild cattle are already in this country with five other large mammals all controversial poss-ibilities. The book also describes the author's work in other European countries and his many visits and exchanges of ideas with conserva-tionists elsewhere. Older SOC members' memories will be stirred by the accounts of the early (failed) attempt to reintroduce White-tailed Eagles to Fair Isle in the 1960s and the spectacular success of Operation Osprey in the Highlands

and beyond. There are six pages of acknowledgements to the organisations and the many people he has met along the way, some no longer with us, such as George Waterston, some now in mature years - note the young-looking John Love on page 40. The black and white photographs give an old-fashioned look which stems from the paper quality, presumably to keep the cost to a certain point. There is considerable discussion of the problems that can arise with some reintroductions, such as Beavers in Perthshire, though I'm not convinced by Roy's conclusion that they should be introduced to every water catchment in the country is practical.

Anyone interested in the recent history of nature conservation in this country will want to read this book.

Stan da Prato

Flight Identification of European Passerines and Select Landbirds. An illustrated and photographic guide. Tomasz Cofta, 2021, Princeton University Press, ISBN: 9780691177571, Flexibound, 496 pages, £27.99.

Tomasz Cofta may not be a household name in Britain, but he is a very experienced field ornithologist and an accomplished illustrator, which comes through in this book. The back cover blurb states that the book is cutting-edge, and I think is a fair assessment. In-flight identification of other species groups such as seabirds and raptors has been well covered in the literature, that of 'small birds' certainly has not.

This publication features 205 European passerines and 32 near-passerines. There are 850 colour illustrations and more than 2,400 photos, chosen to show typical profiles of each species in flight. Flight calls are described phonetically, shown on sonograms, and links are provided to online recordings. I was impressed with the introductory sections: these would be especially useful for someone getting into watching visible migration. Topics such as shape, flight-wave (the imaginary undulating line that the bird's body traces in flight) and flocking behaviour are covered in a detailed but accessible manner using effective diagrams, illustrations, and photos.

Concise texts noting the key features which help distinguish each species in flight sit above illustrations showing various flight views. On the facing page a description of the call, along with sonograms, sits above an extensive photo montage of each species in flight. I am loathe to pick holes in such an impressive undertaking but, although detailed and

attractive, the illustrations do appear a little flat. Normally, I prefer illustrations to photos in identification guides, but here I feel you get more benefit from the photo collections and the useful descriptions in the text. The level of plumage detail shown in the illustrations is unlikely to be seen in flight, and I prefer plates that capture the overall feel of the bird, focusing on shape and those plumage features most likely to be noted. Some of the useful features for identification considered in the introductory chapters could be expanded in the species accounts. There it would be helpful to see flight-wave diagrams for each species and more photos, or illustrations, of relevant species in flocks rather than the few examples given. You could also argue it would be better to give less space to species such as many of the warblers, noted in the text as 'practically inseparable in flight'.

Despite these reservations, I recommend this impressive work. I think newcomers to visible migration in particular will gain the most benefit from it, but even experienced observers will surely learn something new.

Graham Sparshott

New Books also received in the George Waterston Library

European Breeding Bird Atlas 2: Distribution, Abundance and Change. Keller, V., Herrando, S., Vo íšek, P., Franch, M., Kipson, M., Milanesi, P., Martí, D., Anton, M., Klva ová, A., Kalyakin, M.V., Bauer, H.-G. & Foppen, R.P.B., 2020. European Bird Census Council & Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, ISBN: 9-788416-728381, hardback, 967 pages, €90.00.

The Nightingale. Sam Lee, 2021. Century, London, ISBN: 978-1-529-12483-5, hardback, 228 pages, £14.99.

Heathland. Clive Chatters, 2021. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN: 978-1-4729-6474-8, hardback, 432 pages, £35.00

RSPB Spotlight Crows. Mike Unwin, 2021. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN: 978-1-4729-7177-7, paperback, 128 pages, £12.99.

Waterston Library is now open for visitors again. Books can either be borrowed directly at Waterston House during opening hours (check SOC website) or can be posted out (UK only, conditions and p&p charges apply) by emailing the Librarian (Library@the-soc.org.uk).

OBSERVATORIES' ROUNDUP

Observatories' Roundup is a regular bi-annual feature about our bird observatories in Scotland. The intention is to publicise the work of the observatories, visiting opportunities, as well as incidental snippets of news from the islands.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory

We had previously written in detail about the progress that was being made with regards to the rebuild of the Observatory. Unfortunately, our tender process resulted ultimately in only one company submitting a tender.

This tender was several millions over our projected budget and subsequent discussions were unable to reduce that price. We have therefore been unable so far to secure a builder for the planned new Observatory.

Building on Fair Isle is one of the most logistically challenging undertakings for any project in the UK. The COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit only exacerbated these challenges further. We are now undertaking a comprehensive review of the building options with the intention of maintaining, as far as possible, all the previous improvements we had designed. A further tendering process will now have to be undertaken which will take some time.

Consequently, we are now provisionally working towards a rebuild in 2022 with a re-opening in 2023.

The unsuccessful tender and resulting major delay in re-opening required us to urgently review our operational and financial situation. The Observatory building was our main source of income which allowed us to employ staff and carry out our ornithological work. Having sustained an £80,000 deficit in 2020, due to a lack of income and primarily on-going staff costs, this had to be addressed to ensure our solvency and survival as a trust.

We are no different to any other organisation or charity in that without income we cannot survive. While we aim to maintain our core mission, we are now forced to make changes in how we operate in the short term.

Plate 135. Brambling, Fair Isle, 2 October 2020. © *Georgia Platt*

Regrettably, in what has been an extremely difficult decision, which has not been taken lightly or without considerable discussion, we will have to make our Warden (David Parnaby) and Administrator (Susannah Parnaby) redundant. Despite considerable efforts we have been unable to find alternative solutions which could have precluded this. We will meantime endeavour to continue our core ornithological work on Fair Isle as far as circumstances permit until we can fully reopen.

FIBOT remains fully committed to building a new Observatory on Fair Isle and we have no doubt we will succeed. All previous donations to our public appeal are ring-fenced for rebuilding the new Observatory as specified in the appeal criteria.

The support we have received from our long-standing friends has been invaluable in these extremely difficult times. Its continuance will ensure the next decades of ornithological, visitors and investment on Fair Isle.

Douglas Barr, Chairman of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust

North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory

With what was an incredible autumn winding down into winter, you'd be forgiven for thinking the latter stages of the year would have been a quiet affair. However, migrants still continued to arrive well into December. For the meantime though, we'll revert back to the last week of October.

26 October would add yet another Yellow-browed Warbler in Holland Gardens to the island's total, despite best efforts to make this latecomer a bit rarer it wasn't to be; can't be too greedy I suppose! The same day also produced a late Bluethroat around the Storm Petrel trapping area near Obs, the bird would linger until the following day. The first Iceland Gull of the approaching winter was seen on 27 October, along with three Barnacle Geese at Howar and 29th saw us finally add Greenfinch to the year list.

November started well with a Crossbill in Holland, and a very late Redstart on 1st, but the 3rd of the month had one last surprise in store for us, when the islands seventh record of Woodlark appeared on the small patch of grass near the Pier Store. This bird would keep making fleeting appearances into 2021 and was very welcome on both year lists! A Scaup on 8 November at Brides was yet another addition as the late birds kept arriving. The 9th saw a massive fall of over 1,000 Blackbirds mixed in with other thrushes, it also provided us with two Long-eared Owls that ended up in the mist nets in Holland. This was the last real birding action of the month, a Goldfinch at Scottigar and the Green-winged Teal were highlights on 14th, a late Ring Ouzel was at Kirbest on 16th, while a Sparrowhawk was seen over Milldam on 25th.

Plate 136. Woodlark, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 12 November 2020. © *George Gay*

December came and went with very little birdy action, three Iceland Gulls were present on 8th, while a Siskin and a redpoll joined the now 80+ strong Twite flock in the fields close to the Observatory. We finally managed to jam in on the goose action on 16th with three Russian White-fronted Geese and a Bean Goose at Kirbest. A final surprise was in store for one islander when a Little Auk turned up on their doorstep on Christmas Day! Quite the present!

The new year kicked off with quite a few lingering birds that gave the year list a very good look in the early parts of the year. The aforementioned Woodlark remained in the Funny Park, having moved from the Pier Store, a Buzzard was still battling through the winter weather and three Chaffinches were part of the Twite flock at the Obs. The first Pochard in over a year made Brides its home for few days, after narrowly avoiding the 2020 year list on 6 January. From here on out it was all about white-winged gulls, with birds being recorded almost daily from 8 January. The peak count happened on 16th, with eight Glaucous Gulls and three Iceland Gulls in various places during a rather windy WeBs survey! The final monthly highlight for January was a group of 17 Black-tailed Godwits at Brides on 22nd, these represent only the second January record for the species on the island. The month then petered out and it wasn't until late February that things picked up again with a first-winter Little Gull on 19th that stayed very briefly, before its rediscovery on Trolla on 26th, where it showed magnificently for nearly an hour. A Stonechat on 24 February was the first of a little run of birds that included White-billed Diver and Ruff on 26th and the first Sparrowhawk on the final day of the month.

March started with two Risso's Dolphins off the north end, and then stuttered into life slowly, a Woodpigeon and Lesser Black-backed Gull were year list additions on 5th, with the next coming some nine days later in the shape of a small influx of Pied Wagtails. A Rook on

Plate 137. Little Gull, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 26 February 2021. © *George Gay*

20th saw the start of nearly daily additions to the ever expanding year list - four Jackdaws, Goldcrest, Lapland Bunting and Dunnock would all fall before the 25th. The 26th would see our first proper rarity of the year - a third calendar-year American Herring Gull was discovered on Gretchen in the dying light before it vanished off to the south leaving only the finder with the memories of a much sought after island first! A Grey Wagtail on the same date was somewhat overshadowed! A smart Black-throated Diver on 27 March, along with the first Puffins off the Lighthouse, were followed by the first Chiffchaff of the year on 28th and a very smart drake Goosander on 29th to round off March nicely.

Plate 138. American Herring Gull, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 26 March 2021. © *Dante Shepherd*

April has been a rather mixed month to say the least, a record Black Guillemot count on 1st of 995 would be broken again a fortnight later, with 1057 pointing towards a good breeding season for the species. The first Wheatear made landfall at Trolla on 2nd as did the first Whooper Swans, a later first arrival date than usual as they normally winter on the island in some capacity. Sandwich Tern was next to be chalked off on the 4th and they were followed by an Arctic blast of weather that seemingly put spring on the backburner with driving snow showers that coated the island in a sheet of white, and probably made the Lapwings wish they hadn't begun all that displaying in the lovely weather at the back end of March! The Northerlies did however come good, and a seawatch on 7 April while producing no fewer than three White-billed Divers also produced an interesting auk - dumpy and jet black, we could only think it was one thing, a Brünnich's Guillemot, but with a fleeting view and poor photos it had to be left. However, another encounter two days later with a similar bird that produced better photos and more definitive proof made us think both birds were in fact the same. However the devil is in the detail, and only the latter encounter is suitable for submission. The same sea-watch also provided our earliest Sooty Shearwater, an early Manx Shearwater and two Little Auks. A surprise addition on 10 April came in the shape of three White-fronted Geese at Cauldhaim. The 14th would see the first Swallows of the year arrive during a Punding session at Bridesness, while a second Grey Wagtail of the year was at Scottigar and the first White Wagtail was at the Beacon. The final day of this round up produced a further five year ticks and leaves the 2021 year list on 107. A Common Scoter was seen on the coast near T5 in the morning, and followed by a Blackcap at the Bothy, an Arctic Skua on Torness, a Sand Martin at Westness and a White-tailed Eagle that toured the island - delighting those who saw it, including some visiting firefighters!

George Gay,
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Isle of May

Knowledge of the island's bird life in the winter months is generally lacking, since there are no longer people in permanent residence on the Isle of May at this time, although reserve staff and researchers make short visits during December–February. As a result, in more recent decades we only have these snap-shots of the avifauna of the island at this time of year. Typically, the island hosts a small number of Short-eared Owls, which overwinter, taking advantage of the lack of human disturbance and the plentiful supply of mice, whilst small numbers of passerines can be found eking out an existence, including Robin, Dunnock, Wren and Blackbird. Other notable recent records have included an overwintering Whimbrel, the second consecutive winter the bird has found the island to its liking.

However, in early February a series of strong easterly winds brought a good dusting of snow across Scotland which caused temperatures to plummet, and forced birds to the lowlands. Snow on the Isle of May is a rare event as it has only been recorded twice in the last decade (the other was in early March 2018), but hard weather movements of birds were logged during this period. A total of sixty Woodcock were recorded on 11 February, a significant count for the island, and part of a larger influx of this species along the east coast of Britain during this period. Other birds caught up in this movement included Skylarks, Lapwings and winter thrushes, all looking for unfrozen areas to feed and shelter.

Plate 139. Isle of May Bird Observatory in snow, 11 February 2021. © *David Steel*

Finally, despite COVID-19 restrictions, the NatureScot reserve staff returned to live on the island from 22 March, allowing more systematic bird recording. However, as a result of restrictions the bird observatory will remain closed for the spring with the anticipation of opening for the autumn months. As a result of daily coverage of the island, bird records increased correspondingly, and as late March experienced above average temperatures it heralded the start of spring migration. The first Chiffchaff arrived on 24 March, followed by the first Wheatear on 30 March and an early Sand Martin heading north the same day. During this period a Barn Owl was discovered on the north edge of the island on 28th, which was most unexpected. This species is a scarce visitor to the island with records in only ten of the previous forty years but this bird appeared to be in partial residence, as a roost site was discovered, and it was seen on three other occasions until mid-April. Other noteworthy records included both immature and adult Iceland Gull's in the large gull roost on Rona, although a leucistic Herring Gull was more unusual - possibly the same bird which has frequented the south coast of Fife since last year.

Seawatching produced a burst of wildfowl passage, with two Goosanders and six Velvet Scoters, whilst a herd of 58 Whooper Swans heading north on 31 March was more spectacular. On the seabird front, the settled conditions encouraged early nesting with Shags on eggs by 26 March. Despite this early start, it proved to be a false dawn as a series of cold, north-westerly winds dominated the first few weeks of April, noticeably reducing temperatures. With overnight temperatures of -3 degrees, migration virtually came to a standstill and the expected passage of pipits, finches and early summer migrants failed to materialise and it took some time to restart.

David Steel, NatureScot warden, Isle of May
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Plate 140. Stilt Sandpiper, Sanday, Orkney, 23 July 2020. © *Photos by Russell Neave*

Stilt Sandpiper, Sanday, 22–24 July 2020 – first Orkney record

R. NEAVE & E. NEAVE-WEBB

As sometimes happens with these things, I wasn't really out birding at the time but was running an errand on the way home for lunch. As I was heading towards my destination, I stopped to check a favourite flooded area on the edge of a field. I pulled the car up on the road and looking across could see a lone wader in the middle of the nearer pool. Through the binoculars I could see what appeared to be a medium-sized wader which straight away looked interesting, with longish bill and legs and appearing quite dark on the breast, even allowing for the fact it was strongly lit from behind. None of the regular options fitted the bill, the dark breasted impression led my initial thoughts to a juvenile Spotted Redshank, not a regular bird in Orkney and not a species I've seen up here in nearly five years, though it's a species I'm familiar with and saw quite regularly in my old haunts in Essex and East Anglia.

I got out of the car and crept a little way up a track alongside the pool and managed to get slightly better views with the angle of the light not being so harsh. Now I could see better, the bird was clearly not a Spotted Redshank, the legs weren't red for a start and well, it just wasn't one. It was then I started to panic slightly and mildly curse as I ran through the scarcer Western Palearctic waders with a long bill and legs, Terek or Marsh Sand? Nope, I've seen both and neither fitted. This had to be an American wader and on apparent size, dark plumage tones, a bit of rusty about the face and barred flanks, I guessed I was looking at a dowitcher species (I've only seen Long-billed twice in the past) - a moulting adult, given the time of year and Long-billed obviously being the most likely. Just then the bird got up and flew over my head and away; damn! In flight it recalled a small Bar-tailed Godwit in profile with wings angled back sharply, though

with a bit more rear end; it gave an unfamiliar, short, soft call - uttered two or three times. It headed towards a tidal flood area a couple of hundred metres along the road but a quick look there yielded a blank. I elected to dash back home, only a few minutes away, to pick up my wife Emma, 'scope, camera and a field guide or two. We looked over the area for a nearly an hour with no joy. I had the feeling this was going to be one of those 'nearly nailed it birds' as we headed back for a late lunch.

After lunch we headed back out and as luck would have it the bird was back on the pool where I had initially seen it. The light still wasn't great, and the heat haze didn't help as Emma took a few photos while I scoped the bird. We only had a couple of minutes before the bird got up and flew over the car, flushed by some twitchy Golden Plover. It called again and headed off quite high to the north-west; double damn!

We looked at the photos and along with my brief mental notes weighed up the options. Listening to recordings didn't seem to help much with either of the dowitchers. We looked at Stilt Sandpiper, but a poor flight shot Emma got showed a fanned tail with barring towards the tip fading towards the base which didn't seem to fit. The Collins Guide gives the impression it would have a Black-tailed Godwit look, with dark tail band and a contrasting white rump. The angle of the bird in the photo failed to show the total lack of the white rump extending up the back, otherwise we may have reconsidered at the time!

The bird did seem to show red only around the face, I was expecting a bit of orangey tones around the breast for a dowitcher, but maybe just an odd bird we thought and the amount of flank-barring varied considerably depending on which illustration we looked at. We were never going to split Long or Short-billed Dowitcher with the brief views and photos we had, so I put the news out as dowitcher sp. on the local WhatsApp group and messaged George Gay at the Observatory on North Ronaldsay to keep an eye out as it may have headed their way. I checked the area again in the evening, but nothing.

I returned the next morning and fortunately the bird was back. The light conditions were much better than the previous day, thanks to some cloud cover and only light winds. It seemed quite settled feeding and preening so after a quick look I messaged Emma and popped back to pick her up. We returned fully equipped and spent a while watching and photographing the bird. I elected to creep up the track again and try and get some closer photos to hopefully clinch an ID as we still weren't happy we'd nailed it. On getting back to the car we again looked at the

Plates 141 & 142. Stilt Sandpiper, Sanday, Orkney, 23 July 2020.

literature and Emma pulled up some photos on her phone which we compared with my shots; it was then the penny dropped! The bird was feeding with some Dunlin and now it was apparent that bodily it was only a little larger, surely too small for a dowitcher? It could only be a Stilt Sandpiper, a species I'd only seen once before, many years ago at Minsmere.

Having put the news out earlier that the dowitcher was still present I had to hold my hands up and correct the news on the local WhatsApp. I put the news on Birdguides on returning home. The bird was present again the following morning but presumably headed off in advance of the wet and windy weather which came in later in the day.

Though similar to a dowitcher with a strong supercilium and dark-capped look and dark lores, it lacked the "snipe look" with the high set eye. The ears coverts were a soft brick-red with no hint of any reddish, orangey or buffy tones elsewhere. The neck, breast and underside were white with grey blotching on the throat, neck and nape, heavier, black blotching on the lower neck and upper breast area merging into strong black barring across the lower breast, belly, flanks and undertail. The mantle feathering was black with fine, whitish edging: the scapulars a mixture of grey winter plumage and summer plumage, black with white notched edging; lesser and median coverts appeared a mid-greyish, the greater coverts blackish with diffuse paler edges, the tertials were a plain mid-grey and the primaries black.

Being a lone bird meant I hadn't fully appreciated its size; the long bill and legs had given the impression of it being a larger bird. Coupled with the deceptive tail photo and erring on the side of caution (Stilt Sandpiper is somewhat rarer!) meant we had initially come to the wrong conclusion. Thankfully the bird was amenable and stuck around for a couple of days and we were able to get some photos and better views to clinch a county first.

Russell Neave & Emma Neave-Webb,
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Stilt Sandpiper status in Scotland

This Nearctic species has a breeding range along the coastal tundra from NE Alaska east to Arctic Canada to central Nanavut and southern Victoria Island and along SE Hudson Bay. It is entirely migratory, with most wintering from southern Brazil and Bolivia and N. Chile to Uruguay, but some present in central Florida, southernmost California and the eastern Gulf Coast.

There are 39 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2019, with just six of those in Scotland:

2016 *Perth & Kinross, adult, Carsebreck Loch, 24–25 June*
2009 *NE Scotland, adult, Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve, 9–11 July*
2008 *Outer Hebrides, one, Rubha Ardvule, 14–15 September*
2002 *Shetland, juvenile, Norwick, Unst, 5–7 November*
1976 *Shetland, one, Garth's Loch, Scatness, Mainland, 11–18 September*
1970 *Highland, one, Dornoch Point, 18 April.*

This is one of the rarer North American vagrant waders to NW Europe, probably because its southward autumn migration follows the central overland flyway, rather than the east coast, though it is more to the east in spring. The Scottish records are notably scattered, mirroring those in the rest of Britain which tend be at well-watched coastal sites from Northumberland and Lancashire to Dorset, but mostly in East Anglia and along the south coast.

The Scottish records are spread from spring and summer to a slight peak in a protracted autumn window, while elsewhere in Britain the find dates are from April (1), May (5), July (9), August (11) and September (5), with one incidence of overwintering by an individual in Dorset/Hampshire from 11 September 2017 to 1 March 2018 (109 days overall). One other long-stayer was at Frodsham, Cheshire from 16 April to 3 October 1984 (171 days) though most linger for (far) less than two weeks. There were 19 records in Ireland to the end of 2019, with one found in mid-May, one in late June, one in mid-July, seven in August, seven in September and two in October.

Three problem 'yellow-legged gulls' from Shetland

A.H.J. HARROP & R. RIDDINGTON

Introduction

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* is rare in Scotland (40 records up to 2018), and a vagrant in Shetland (currently two accepted records). Consequently, records are subjected to close scrutiny. Here we discuss three 'yellow-legged gulls' which presented significant identification problems both in the field and during subsequent discussions. Although we have concentrated on Shetland records, our findings may have implications for records elsewhere in Scotland.

Yellow-legged Gull

The appearance of Yellow-legged Gull has been discussed in some detail in standard texts (e.g. Olsen & Larsson 2003, and Howell & Dunn 2007 from an American perspective). As noted by Jonsson 1998, in general Yellow-legged Gull is somewhat smaller than 'Baltic Herring Gulls' (*Larus argentatus argentatus*). Experience from the East Midlands suggests that in comparison with 'British Herring Gulls' (*L. a. argenteus*), Yellow-legged Gulls which arrive during the summer tend to appear similar in size, with a slightly squarer head and parallel-sided bill which can give some birds a distinctive 'look'. Structural features are variable, however, so should be used with caution. Vocalisations have been discussed by Constantine & The Sound Approach (2006), Wroza (2019, 2020), and Adriaens *et al.* (2020), though this is a complex area and we still have much to learn. Nominate Yellow-legged Gulls sound appreciably different from Herring Gulls, but recordings are necessary for meaningful comparison with other taxa and hybrids remain something of an unknown quantity.

Moult strategy in adults (following Olsen & Larsson and www.gull-research.org)

- Normal Herring P1 mid-May–early July
- Normal Yellow-legged Gull PP1–2 May (but see Adriaens *et al.* 2020 for variation in Atlantic birds)
- Normal Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) starts late May–mid-June in *graellsii/intermedius*, reaches PP2–4 July

Hybrids and other pitfalls

- 'Yellow-legged' Herring Gulls (*L.a. argentatus*): These can be a significant problem (e.g. Jonsson 1998) but don't normally show a wing pattern which matches Yellow-legged, and the **long call is different.**

Hybrids (mainly based on Adriaens 2003 & 2012): Adriaens (2003) made the following general remarks: "there was one consistent character in all nine Zeebrugge birds: the very **broad, white scapular and tertial crescents.** I am at a loss to explain where these come from. The upperparts were usually darker grey than in any *michahellis* Yellow-legged Gull, with a slight bluish tinge, but two birds were paler grey, like a pale Yellow-legged Gull. The head shape was normally more rounded than in that species. The legs were dull yellowish to almost bright yellow. The (pale) red gonys spot did not reach onto the upper mandible, except in one or two birds. The colour of the eyering was usually difficult to record in the field, but on two birds it looked reddish-orange. The primary pattern was usually characterized by a large amount of black on the outermost three to four primaries — except for the rather large white mirror(s) on p10(-9) — but comparatively little black on p6–5 (i.e. no more than in *argenteus* Herring Gull). The grey tongue on p10 was normally very short. In most birds, primary moult occurred rather late in the season (sometimes not before late June–early July!), as in Lesser Black-backed Gull." Adriaens (2012) developed these initial findings and showed that some hybrids, including adults but especially juveniles, can be very similar to Yellow-legged Gull and "virtually impossible to identify correctly". As noted below, some presumed hybrids cannot be identified by plumage alone.

Based on photographic evidence, known hybrids have shown the following features:

- Herring Gull x Lesser Black-backed Gull: slightly shorter primary projection than Yellow-legged Gull, long sloping forehead, long grey tongues on primaries, broad white secondary tips (broader than inner primaries)
- Herring Gull x Yellow-legged Gull: upperparts can be darker grey than Yellow-legged Gull (Adriaens 2003) though usually similar to or slightly paler than that species, PP can be identical to Yellow-legged Gull, can be white-headed in winter; can have green toned legs and slightly wider trailing edge to secondaries
- Yellow-legged Gull x Lesser Black-backed Gull: slightly darker grey upperparts than Yellow-legged Gull with blue tinge, upperwing similar to Yellow-legged Gull

Shetland 'yellow-legged gulls' have included both stereotypical presumed Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull hybrids (one example documented here) and much more subtle birds.

Three problem birds - 1. Aith, at least 25–27 July 2011, considered to be an adult

Description (with some critical features in bold)

The bird's general appearance was intermediate between Herring Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull. It had a sleek profile without much of a tertial step. The head showed quite a long sloping forehead, and the peak of the crown normally appeared to be behind the eye. The primary projection showed three primary tips beyond the tip of the tail. The primaries and tail did not appear very worn.

Upperparts: The head and tail were white. The mantle was grey, **distinctly darker than Herring Gull** but paler than *graellsii* Lesser Black-back. The white scapular and tertial crescents were not especially narrow, and the **tertials were not discrete from the white secondary tips.** The upper wing (for primaries see below) showed narrow dark marks on the outer four greater primary coverts. The white tips of the secondaries were possibly slightly wider than the

Plate 143. Presumed Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull, Aith, Shetland, July 2011. Note the rather dark mantle, white 'skirt' below the greater coverts, and contrasting dark bar along tips of coverts on underwing. See text for details of primaries. © *Roger Riddington*

tips of the inner primaries, though not by much. P2 was missing and P1 was regrowing.

Underparts: The underparts were white. The underwing (for primaries see below) showed quite a **strong dark grey 'bar' along the base of the secondaries** (visible in multiple images).

Bare parts: The bill was bright yellow with a paler tip and a slight gonydeal angle; the bright red gonys spot bled onto the upper mandible. The iris was pale yellow, possibly with a slight greenish cast. The orbital ring was red or reddish. The legs and feet were dull yellow, clearly less bright than the bill.

Voice: The call was not recorded, but *Shetland Bird Report* 2011 stated (without giving details) that **photos of the bird in the 'long call' pose helped establish that it could not be Yellow-legged Gull.**

Primaries (itemised separately because the precise pattern can only be seen in photographs, more or less symmetrical, not particularly worn)

P10 **upperside** - both webs dark to base, medium white mirror, lacked white apical spot
underside - **both webs dark to base** with paler shaft

P9 **upperside** - outer web dark to base, inner web grey at base only
underside - some grey at base of at least inner web

P8 **upperside** - outer web dark almost to base, inner web with grey extending two thirds of way down feather
underside - grey extending about half way down outer web, inner web not clearly visible

P7 **upperside** - outer web grey with dark wedge extending from tip three quarters of way to base, inner web grey for three quarters of its length up to black tip
underside - similar to upperside

P6 **upperside** - outer web similar to P7, but dark wedge slightly shorter, inner web grey with whitish fringe between grey and black tip
underside - whitish fringe on inner web also visible on underside

P5 **upperside** - outer web grey with subterminal black broader on outer web, whitish fringe between black and grey on both webs
underside - whitish fringe also visible on underside

Also, small dark marks on the outer web of P4 near the tip.

Discussion

Moult strategy

Given that it was late July it is surprising that the bird showed so little wear, and the moult strategy seems very late compared with the norm for Yellow-legged Gull.

Hybrids and other pitfalls

Based on the examples above, the Aith gull showed several hybrid characters which are consistent with what is known about Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Feedback

Feedback was provided by Chris Gibbins and included the following (with minor editing): "This is a classic problem Scottish 'YLG'. Black marks on the primary coverts can be retained by very old birds so I'd suggest we call this bird an adult, in the absence of any other clear signs of immaturity. One thing that appears helpful is the pattern on P6 and 7. The Shetland bird seems to have very long black pointed bayonets up the outer edge of these feathers (like *smithsonianus*), with this black extending much further up the outer web of the feather than the black on the inner web There also seems to be a rather alarming contrasting dark bar along the underside of the secondaries The bird is remarkably fresh for any late July Yellow-legged Gull."

As noted above, several of this bird's features were not typical of Yellow-legged Gull. It can be identified as a hybrid with reasonable confidence, and seems most likely to have been Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull.

2. Foula, 24 May–22 June 2019, considered to be a third-summer bird

Description (with some critical features in bold)

The bird was Fulmar-oiled, and as a consequence was in poor condition. In most images, it showed a slight tertial step. It fairly consistently showed a sloping forehead and flattish crown. The primary projection showed three primary tips beyond the tip of the tail.

Upperparts: The head was white, with some brown staining. The mantle was mid-grey, though again in some images staining was apparent. The uppermost tertial was grey (very worn), whilst the **lower feathers had dark brown centres (paler than the primaries but certainly dark) and white at or near the tip.** In some photos of the bird at rest the left innermost secondary is visible, showing a double chevron pattern; the pattern on the right wing is different (plain dark centre) which combined with the poor condition of the feathers makes it difficult to interpret. The upperwing (for primaries see below) showed a complex pattern of dark marks on the coverts, including the outer five primary coverts. The secondaries had dark brown centres forming a bar on the upperwing. All the primaries were present. The tail was white with worn dark subterminal marks; where these were most complete (T5 on the left side) they appeared as a **quite narrow (roughly one eighth) blackish subterminal band with browner mottling extending about one quarter of the way up the feather.**

Underparts: The underparts were white. The underwing and axillaries (for primaries see below) were mainly white, with some browner markings on the coverts and secondaries (though some of these may have been caused by staining).

Bare parts: The bill was bright yellow with a slight gonydeal angle; the bright red gonys spot did not appear to bleed onto the upper mandible. The iris was pale with an almost pale greenish-yellow cast. The orbital ring was **unequivocally bright red.** The legs and feet were dull yellow, possibly with some pinkish tones on the webs. The claw on the right hind toe appeared to have been damaged.

Voice: The voice was not recorded.

Plate 144. Presumed Yellow-legged Gull hybrid, Foula, Shetland, June 2019. Note the bright red orbital ring, tail pattern (see text), worn blackish outer five primaries contrasting with grey inner primaries of same generation, and lack of active moult. © *Roger Riddington, Donna & Geoff Atherton*

Primaries (more or less symmetrical, quite worn)
P10 **upperside** - blackish on outer and inner webs
underside - a shade paler along the shaft
P9 **upperside** - blackish on outer and inner webs
underside - dark brown on both webs
P8 **upperside** - blackish on outer web, a shade greyer towards tip on inner web
underside - dark brown on both webs
P7 **upperside** - blackish on outer web, greyer towards tip on inner web
underside - greyish on inner web with darker tip
P6 **upperside** - blackish on outer web, greyer towards tip on inner web
underside - paler grey on inner web with darker tip
P5 **upperside** - grey on outer and inner webs, **broad black subterminal (broader on outer web)** which looks typical of Yellow-legged, worn at tip
underside - grey on inner web, darker towards tip
Also, small dark marks on the outer web of P4 near the tip.

Discussion

Moult strategy

In second-summer birds (following Olsen & Larsson and www.gull-research.org); subsequent moults are similar to an adult

- Herring Gull: similar to adult, but earlier; P1 (sometimes T1–2) often mid-April, P9–10 mostly October–November, coverts from mid-April–June
- Yellow-legged Gull: birds from late June had renewed up to P5–6, some coverts and parts of tail (populations from northern Spain, Madeira and Azores have a later moult)
- Lesser Black-backed Gull: similar to adult, but sometimes earlier

In their discussion of 3cy Lesser Black-backed Gull, Muusse *et al.* (2005) noted that the extent of moult in the winter quarters in *graellsii* and *intermedius* is variable: "the most obvious scenario would be that moult on the wintering grounds in a 3cy Lesser Black-backed Gull progresses in the following, more or less overlapping and probably simplified, sequence: the rectrices first, followed by the secondaries, and finally the primaries."

Howell (2001) argued that since a) in general birds do not moult and migrate at the same time, and b) if a bird's food intake is only sufficient to fuel its baseline metabolism, it will not have the energy to moult, some caution is warranted when using moult characteristics in field identification. Nonetheless, most gulls do follow a recognisable sequence and exceptions invite explanation.

The 2019 Foula bird's appearance and moult strategy did not match typical Herring Gull, or 'typical' *graellsii/intermedius* Lesser Black-backed Gull (allowing for the wide range of individual variation). Although it closely resembled Yellow-legged Gull, its moult was certainly atypical for that species too.

Hybrids and other pitfalls

In addition to mantle and leg colour, most Herring Gulls differ from the Foula bird in tertial pattern, tail pattern, and the pattern of P5 amongst other things. A second-summer Herring x Lesser Black-backed hybrid in Adriaens (2012) showed less yellow legs, more Herring-like tertials, a much broader tail band, and browner axillaries. However, a third-winter presumed Yellow-legged x Herring Gull (gull-research.org/ylg/ylg1cy/mtblack.html) photographed in the Netherlands in March 2016 showed a similar combination of dark outer primaries (without any mirrors) and grey inner primaries. As a juvenile, that bird strongly resembled Yellow-legged Gull.

Feedback

Peter Adriaens provided feedback. Initially he supported identification as Yellow-legged Gull; after seeing a wider range of images he considered that the plumage looked fine for Yellow-legged Gull, but felt that the lack of active moult and relatively thin, short bill might make it impossible to rule out a hybrid.

On the basis of the combination of features listed above, in particular the pattern and moult strategy of the primaries, it seems most likely that this bird was a hybrid Yellow-legged Gull. It is notable, however, that its plumage features are all individually compatible with Yellow-legged Gull. *This bird was submitted to SBRC but found not proven on review, due to*

the apparent anomalies mentioned above, and after receiving expert comment from Martin Elliott (Mark Wilkinson pers com).

3. Hillwell and Ringasta, Shetland, 26–30 June 2020, considered to be an adult

Description (with some critical features in bold)

The bird was similar in size to a small Herring Gull, with a sleek profile and not much of a tertial step. The head had a sloping forehead and flattish to slightly rounded crown. The primary projection showed three primary tips beyond the tip of the tail. The primaries and tail were quite worn.

Upperparts: The head and tail were white. The mantle was grey, clearly darker than Herring Gull in direct comparison, slightly darker than adult Common Gull, without any obvious blue tones. The white scapular crescents were narrow. **The white tertial crescents were narrow and discrete.** The upperwing (for primaries see below) showed some dark in the primary coverts, especially the outermost two greater coverts which also had narrow pale fringes - **this does seem to be more unusual in adult Yellow-legged Gull than Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The white tips of the secondaries were similar in width to the tips of the inner primaries.** P1&2 were missing.

Underparts: The underparts were white. The underwing (for primaries see below) showed a narrow greyish line along the tips of the primary coverts, and a greyish 'bar' along the base of the secondaries.

Bare parts: The bill was bright yellow, slightly brighter than the legs, with a shallow gonydeal angle and slightly bulbous tip. The bright red spot on the gonys appeared to bleed slightly onto the upper mandible. The iris was less pale than Herring Gull in direct comparison (which is normal in Yellow-legged Gull). The orbital ring was reddish above and below the eye, but difficult to say whether it was bright red. The

Plate 145. Presumed hybrid 'yellow-legged gull', Ringasta, Shetland, June 2020 (with Herring Gull for comparison). Note the size and structure compared with Herring Gull, bright yellow legs, discrete tertial crescents, and greyish 'bar' along the base of the secondaries. See text for details of primaries. © *Roger Riddington*

legs and feet were bright yellow, as bright as Lesser Black-backed Gull, and sometimes looked longish.

Voice: Although the bird was heard calling on the evening of 29 June, it was not recorded. The long call posture was clearly seen twice: the **head was lowered with the bill pointing towards the legs, then 'thrown' upwards until pointing vertically (at 90° to the body).**

Primaries (not perfectly symmetrical, which is not unusual in large white-headed gulls)

P10 **upperside** - outer web dark to base, medium white mirror, dark band towards tip, small white apical spot
underside - outer web paler on underside

P9 **upperside** - outer web dark to base, some grey at base of inner web, small white mirror
underside - some grey at base of outer web

P8 **upperside** - grey at base of outer web and about twice as extensive on inner web
underside - pattern not clearly visible

P7 **upperside** - black extends up outer web about halfway from tip to coverts, whitish fringe between black and grey on inner web
underside - whitish fringe also visible on underside

P6 **upperside** - black about twice as broad on outer compared with inner web, whitish fringe between black and grey on inner web
underside - whitish fringe also visible on underside

P5 **upperside** - black on outer and inner webs similar in width (perhaps slightly broader on outer), whitish fringe between black and grey on at least inner web
underside - whitish fringe also visible on underside

Discussion

Moult strategy

The moult strategy of this bird seemed consistent with Yellow-legged Gull, though less advanced than some at the same stage.

Hybrids and other pitfalls

Of the examples we have - albeit limited in number - Herring Gull x Lesser Black-backed Gull arguably matched the Hillwell bird least well. Given its combined appearance, long call and moult strategy, it follows that one of the parents is likely to have been Yellow-legged Gull or Lesser Black-backed Gull. A hybrid between the two is possible, and statistically credible given the situation in the Low Countries.

Feedback

Feedback was provided by Carl Baggott, and included the following: "To me, it appears to be a sub-adult due to the black on the longest primaries bleeding into the primary coverts and the bill pattern. I don't see the dipped in ink effect on the wing tip that you typically see on *michahellis* in flight (lots of black). Sub-adults can have more black on the primaries than adults. P8 on this bird appears to have less black and a slightly different pattern than I would expect. The P5 band is a little weak although possibly within variation. Eastern birds can show less black on the primaries, but I would expect the P10 pattern to be different to this bird.

"Structurally it could match a very small female *michahellis* or even *lusitanius*. Its head lacks the typical square shape, but again a small YLG could have a rounded head."

On the basis of the bird's relatively small size and less black than normal in the primaries (compared with typical Yellow-legged, though Peter Adriaens considered it well within the variation of Yellow-legged Gull), it seems most likely that this bird was a hybrid. Its parentage is difficult to determine with any confidence but is likely to have involved Yellow-legged and/or Lesser Black-backed Gull. It is also possible that it was a small Yellow-legged Gull.

Accepted Shetland records

1. Adult, Burrafirth, Unst, 10 January 2001 (Harvey 2002)

On the basis of the published account, through no fault of the observers, it is difficult to exclude the possibility of a hybrid, especially as the photograph shows a prominent white 'skirt' below the greater coverts.

2. Adult, Ham, Foula, 6–7 July 2014 (when found dead)

Had been ringed as a chick in Sardinia in 2000 (specimen transferred to NMS in August 2016, where it was prepared as a skeleton and a tissue sample taken)

An account of this bird has not been published, but from the published and additional unpublished images the following features are visible:

General appearance: The bird showed a sloping forehead and flattish crown, red orbital ring, parallel-sided bill with red of gonydeal spot bleeding onto upper mandible, pale yellow legs, mid-grey mantle, discrete narrow white tertial crescents, and three primary tips beyond the tip of the tail.

Primaries (slightly asymmetrical):

P10 upperside - outer web dark to base, small white mirror on left wing, medium mirror on right, dark band towards tip, small white apical spot

P9 upperside - outer web dark almost to base, grey on basal third of inner web, no mirror

P8 upperside - grey at base of outer web and about twice as extensive on inner web

P7 upperside - black extends up outer web about halfway from tip to coverts

P6 upperside - black about twice as broad on outer compared with inner web, narrow whitish fringe between black and grey on inner web

P5 (about half grown) upperside - subterminal black 'U' developing on outer web only (which is unusual in Yellow-legged Gull)

Future records

Given that hybrids are apparently more frequent in Shetland than Yellow-legged Gull, and that after the first generation they really are impossible to identify, the validity of field records is questionable. It is notable that two of the birds discussed above did not appear to be typical Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull, which is the hybrid traditionally assumed to be most likely to occur in Shetland.

Future records will require a high level of documentation: in addition to field notes, good photographs of the primaries which confirm the precise pattern should be taken; if possible, sound recordings of any calls should be made. Even with high-quality documentation, some records may be considered unproven.

Acknowledgements

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Take 'heed', unusual call of a migrant Common Redstart

P. STRONACH, R. MARTIN, R.L. SWANN & N. MARTINEZ

On 5 October 2020, Peter Stronach and Bob Swann found a Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* at Tarbat Ness, Highland. It was an unusual individual in that, in the run up to finding it, it had been calling constantly from thick cover. It was giving a high-pitched flat piping call, which we recognised as being superficially similar to a Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*. It was with some surprise then when a Redstart appeared after hearing these calls. PS made a sound recording on his mobile phone and took some record shots.

The bird, most likely a female, was aged as a first-winter based on worn and pointed tail feathers, diffusely paler fringes to primary coverts and the broad whitish tips to the inner primaries.

Vocalisations of different races of Common Redstart

The nominate race of Common Redstart *ssp phoenicurus*, and the race Ehrenburg's Redstart *ssp samamisicus* have differing song structures (Ayé *et al.* 2014). Calls were thought to be different between the two races with *ssp phoenicurus* giving a rising '*huid*' and *ssp samamisicus* giving a flat '*heed*' call, however calls within *ssp phoenicurus* in the Balkans, Southern France, the Italian peninsula, the Caucasus and eastern Russia were found to also give the 'heed' call (Martinez and Martin 2020). Figure 1 below shows the distribution of the different call variants throughout the range of Common Redstart.

Comparison of Tarbat Ness bird's call

The call recorded at Tarbat Ness can be heard on the xeno-canto.org website (recording XC592758), a sonogram of the call is given in Figure 2 with a comparison of other call types from *ssp phoenicurus* and *ssp samamisicus*. The

Figure 1. Distribution of call variants across the breeding range of Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. Each marker corresponds to an individual, map sources: www.birdlife.com (breeding range) and Natural Earth (www.naturalearthdata.com, background, countries). Subspecies ranges based on Shirihai and Svensson (2018).

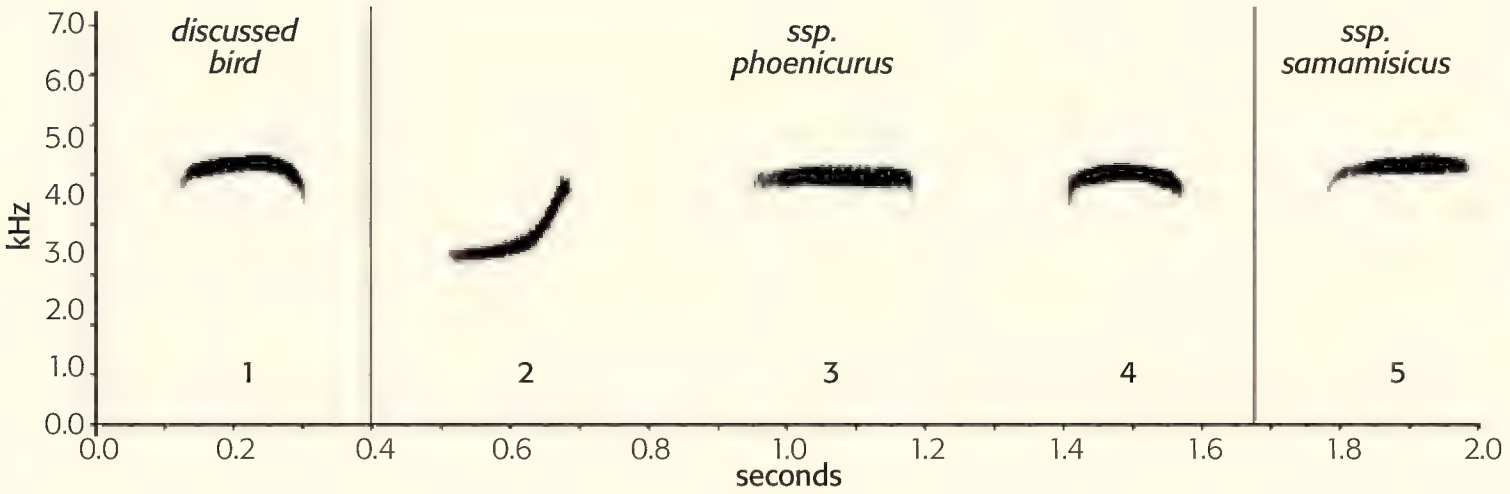

Figure 2. Comparison of the Tarbat Ness individual's call with other examples. 1. The constant '*heed*' call given by the Tarbat Ness individual (Peter Stronach; XC592758), 2. Typical example of a '*huid*' call from a breeding *ssp phoenicurus* in Glenfeshie, Scotland (Stuart Fisher; XC24948), 3. a constant '*heed*' type call from a breeding *ssp phoenicurus* from Italy (Dimitri; XC571999) 4. a constant '*heed*' call from a breeding *ssp phoenicurus* from Lake Baikal, Russia on the 15 June 2019 (Ralph Martin) 5. a constant '*heed*' type call from a breeding *ssp samamisicus* in Georgia (Jarmo Pirhonen; XC412822).

Plate 146. Common Redstart at Tarbat Ness, Highland, 5 October 2020. © *Peter Stronach*

gradient of the call was measured at ~1 kHz/s, which compares to values of 6 kHz/s to more than 15 kHz/s in typical 'northern' *ssp. phoenicurus*. Calls with comparable low gradients to the Tarbat Ness bird are known from the southern and eastern populations of *ssp. phoenicurus* as well as in the *ssp. samamisicus*.

Other examples of '*heed*' type calls in Common Redstarts in northwestern Europe

There are a couple of examples of rising "heed" calls with a gradient greater than 2 kHz/s from northwestern Europe. One was recorded close to Berlin, Germany by G. Tembrock, 22.07.1989 (available on tierstimmen.org) with a gradient of 3.7 kHz/s. Another was recorded in northern Norway close to Tromso by S. Nilsen, 23.06.2011 (XC92981) with a gradient of 6.4 kHz/s.

There are no examples of a constant 'heed' call with a gradient of less than 2kHz/s from northwestern Europe which makes the Tarbat Ness bird extraordinary and suggests a southern or eastern origin for this migrant, rather than Scandinavia which Riddington (2002) suggests is the main source of autumn migrants in Britain. From the plumage it is not possible to rule out this individual being an *ssp samamisicus*.

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Nicolas Martinez, Hintermann and Weber AG, Reinach, Switzerland.

Plate 147. Western Orphean Warbler, Lothbeg Point, Highland, 11 October 2020. © *Photos by Mark Wilkinson*

Western Orphean Warbler, Lothbeg Point, Highland, 10 October 2020 – third Scottish record

D. MACASKILL

My plan for 10 October 2020 was to check out some patches of trees and scrub north of Embo, Sutherland, and work my way back home for lunch before walking out to Dornoch Point. The forecast was for sunshine with blustery showers from the SW, not ideal conditions for searching for migrants on the east coast of Sutherland, not that we are especially well placed for seeing them as most occur to the north and east of us.

The morning started well, with a Yellow-browed Warbler near Helmsdale in calm, sunny conditions. As I called in to my next patch, the wind had got up and it started to rain, with five male Bullfinchs eating rowan berries being the only highlight. Next stop was Lothbeg Point, where there is a sheltered embankment covered in gorse with a scattering of Elder trees. I usually sea-watch here, and have only ever found migrant Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Goldcrest, so not exactly a migrant magnet. It was now raining heavily as I walked below the embankment locating a few Robins and a skulking Dunnock. As I walked back a movement in a small Elder tree half way up the bank caught my eye, it was a female type Blackcap, just behind it obscured by branches I saw another small greyish bird with a black head, male Blackcap I thought. Then as it moved I saw it had a black mask and a white throat, then it vanished. Now with alarm bells ringing I needed to see this bird again. I stayed on the spot for an hour in the pouring rain but saw no further sign of the bird.

I messaged Bob Swann around 12:30 hrs and gave him a description of what I saw. Bob offered to come up and help look for the bird but I said it may just be a Lesser Whitethroat, so best wait to see if it reappears. A few minutes later it popped up in the furthest Elder to my left and in the second or so I saw it I had enough to rule out Lesser Whitethroat, so I messaged Bob again. I told him it wasn't a Lesser Whitethroat but looked "Sardinian like". It did not show again until just after Bob

arrived, when we both had a very brief view of it in the closest Elder before it vanished back into the gorse. At 14:40 hrs it was back in the Elder. I had my bridge camera ready on full zoom so when it finally moved out onto the edge of the tree, I managed some record shots before it disappeared into the gorse. A few minutes later I put a photo on the local WhatsApp group. Then my phone went into overdrive with all the messages "Dean it's got a pale eye" "Dean it's an Orphean". This was not on my radar at all! In the dull conditions in the field we could not pick out the pale eye and the head looked all black. So now we were looking at an Orphean Warbler, but which one?

Peter Stronach then arrived and confirmed from my photo that the bird was indeed an Orphean. We had a few more brief views, then next on the scene were Keith and Rosie Barnes. Keith had a DSLR camera and managed to get a few good shots of the bird showing detail that was hard to see on the brief field views we had been getting, which had not been helped by the poor weather conditions. Importantly he managed to get some shots of the plain, buffy undertail coverts confirming that it was in fact a Western Orphean - only the third record for Scotland. Now happy the bird had been positively ID'd I decide to call it a day after five hours in the rain. As I was leaving a few other Highland birders began to arrive at the site. Thankfully the rain stopped and the bird started to show well giving everyone great views of the critical ID features.

Plate 148. Western Orphean Warbler, Lothbeg Point, Highland, 11 October 2020.

Next morning Peter Stronach was back at first light and put the news out that the bird was still present. Peter managed to get some fantastic shots in much improved conditions compared to the previous day and many visiting birders were treated to some lovely views of a much more obliging bird!

There have been just two previous records of Western Orphean Warbler in Scotland. Both occurred in 2016; at Loch of Benston, Shetland Mainland on 06 October, and at Finstown, Orkney Mainland on 18–21 October (trapped and ringed). There is also a record of an Orphean Warbler species (trapped and ringed) at Seaton Park, Aberdeen on 10 October 1982, which pre-dates the split of Orphean Warbler into Western Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*) and Eastern Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia crassirostris*). Unfortunately, the contemporary notes were insufficient to separate it on later review, so it remains as an 'either/or' record. However, a pattern of early to mid-October on the east coast or the northern isles would seems to be the time and place to find this species, although it is likely to remain only an extreme vagrant in a Scottish context.

Western Orphean Warbler breeds in the Iberian peninsula through southern France to Italy plus Morocco to Libya. On the breeding grounds it inhabits open woodland and forest scrub. It is a long distance migrant and winters south of the Sahara.

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Plate 149. Red-flanked Bluetail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 25 October 2020. © *Bob McMillan*

Red-flanked Bluetail, Creachan, Barra, 17–26 October 2020 – second Outer Hebrides record

S.L. RIVERS

I have been spending my autumn holidays birding on Barra for 19 years now - as part of the 'Barra Boys' team. During these visits we have spent a lot of time scouring the island for rare and scarce birds and have become very familiar with the various areas of cover - particularly down the east side of the island. One of our most productive areas for unusual birds has been the Creachan Community Woodland near Breibhig, and it has become a regular stop for all of us, and a regular 'ringing-site' for team member, Mark Oksien. Over the years we have cleared a circular path around the outer edge of the central mass of cover, and Mark has created two main net-rides through the centre and a number of secondary net-rides around the woodland edges. I usually time my walks south from our accommodation at Balnabodach such that I reach Creachan for lunchtime, and my favoured lunch stop is a dilapidated wooden bench at the west end, near the steps down into the woodland, and close to the bend in the road which forms its north and west boundary.

On 17 October, the morning was initially dull with a NNE Force 2–3, however, by midday it was quite bright, with sunny periods. I reached my lunch stop at Creachan at about 12:40 hrs and had settled on the bench and started to eat my sandwich and had poured a drink. At this point I was joined by Calum Scott, who sat at his favourite spot at the bottom of the stairs down into the wood - he had previously found a Red-eyed Vireo while sitting there some years back, and there is only room for one on the bench.

He had just started on his own lunch when I looked up and scanned the ground cover and lower branches of the trees beside the path through the north side of the woodland. A small bird was visible on a branch beside one of the larger trees just over 30 feet away, and I was rather surprised when I realised what I had seen - I turned to Calum and said "No kidding, but I reckon I have just had a front-on view of a Red-flanked Bluetail!" (He had found one on North Ronaldsay in May 2019 and I had told him I was envious and had hoped to find one myself, so wanted him to believe I was serious!).

We sat there for about a minute, while he finished off his sandwich and I poured the hot drink back into my flask, then we went in search of the bird. The initial sighting was just west of the first main net-ride towards its north end but we could not see it in that area, so Calum said he would check up at the second net-ride and where the outer path joins that, while I remained at the first area. Within a couple of minutes he radio'd to tell me he had just seen and photographed the bird and I walked round to join him (Creachan is one of several mobile phone blackspots on the east side of the island, so we take 'walkie-talkies' out with us to solve this problem). This time I managed to see the whole bird before it flitted back into the undergrowth, and Calum did the heroic thing and headed-up to the top of the hill on the road between Creachan and Gleann to put the news out to the others on the island. By his return I had seen the bird again, towards the north part of the outer path nearer the original location, and by the time the other birders started arriving it was back near the NW corner, where it showed well and everyone was able to get good views and take photographs. The bird was then on show almost continuously from 14:00 hrs, ranging from its favoured NW corner to the east end of the woodland, mostly on the north side. It was chased several times by one (or more) of the local Robins, but always returned to the more open scrub in the NW corner.

The bird remained in the Creachan woodland until 26 October (I left the island on 23rd) with Bob McMillan probably the last person to see it. It started to range a bit wider on its second day, with observations from the open woodland and scrub at the east boundary of the Community Woodland, and beyond the road at the west end around a single sycamore about 50 m west of the road and into the bracken covered hillside around there before returning to the woodland.

The bird had a size and shape quite similar to a Common Redstart, but less heavily built and with a less rounded, slightly pinched-in head shape like a Red-breasted Flycatcher. Its behaviour was generally like a cross between a Robin and a Redstart - very active, searching for food among vegetation on the ground, in the scrub layer and in the lower branches of the trees. However, it would occasionally sit quite still for up to a minute. At such times it would regularly dip/twitch its tail downwards (with a slower, less deliberate return upwards) and few times it spread its tail as well as dipping it.

The bird showed well over its stay and there is no need for a description here - it really was as gorgeous as the pictures illustrate!

Age & sex of the bird

The bird was clearly not an adult male in breeding/post-breeding plumage, so the ageing/sexing of the bird was to try to establish if it was possible to positively assign it rather than leave it as probable 'first-calendar year/post-breeding adult female'. Red-flanked Bluetail follows the same moult strategy as Common Redstart - only a moult of body feathers in its first calendar-year, with the primaries, secondaries and tail feathers not moulted until the autumn of its second calendar-year, when all feathers are renewed. Adults then moult all feathers in autumn each year, and acquire breeding plumage by abrasion of paler feather tips revealing the underlying colour of the main part. A number of publications were consulted to try to answer this question, but the most authoritative was found to be a paper by Hellström & Norevick in *British Birds* from 2013.

First-calendar-year birds (1cy) show a definite moult-limit in the greater coverts where the innermost newly acquired feather lies next to outermost older one. 1cy birds typically moult up to three of the outermost greater coverts and never more than seven. When examined in the

Plate 150. Red-flanked Bluetail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 18 October 2020. © *Mark Oksien*

hand, the Creachan bird did not show any such moult limit, and the colour of the outer fringes of the greater coverts were olive-brown and concolorous with the scapulars and mantle, indicating all had been renewed - as only an adult would show (see plate 151).

The olive-brown colour was also seen on the outer vanes of the primary coverts, forming an olive-brown panel in the folded wing which does not noticeably contrast with the lesser and greater covert fringing or scapulars colouration. In a 1cy bird the primary covert fringes have a more rufous tone (retained from juvenile) and this forms a rich brown panel in the folded wing which contrasts with the olive-brown of the scapulars and the fringing shown by the newly moulted coverts (see plates 150 and 151). This also suggests the Creachan bird was an adult.

Plate 151. Red-flanked Bluetail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 18 October 2020. © *Mark Oksien*

Plate 152. Red-flanked Bluetail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 18 October 2020. © *Stuart Rivers*

central pair were actually slightly rounded when examined in the hand, consistent with them being adult. The bird showed no evidence of feather wear in its tail feathers, again with the projecting tip of the rachis intact.

With the age of the bird established it was fairly straightforward to assign the sex of the bird. The Creachan bird had a decent size and intensity for its orange flank patch, but the orange was not as strong as would be shown by a post-breeding male (according to the 2013 paper), nor the orange patch as extensive.

The intensity of the 'electric' blue of the tail, uppertail coverts and lower back varied significantly according to the angle of light - and was generally brighter in the field than in the hand. When examined in the hand, there were traces of cobalt blue feather bases in the lesser coverts and on the outer edges of the outer wing feathers. This was within the known extent and distribution (to feather tract) for blue feather bases in female birds. Similarly, the strength of the cobalt blue hues fell within the limits shown by known adult females, but were not the typical extensive bright blue feather bases of a post-breeding moulted (2cy+) male [compare pics of

Some of the sharper pics of the wing showed that the primaries and secondaries were all fresh with virtually no signs of wear - even to the extent that the small projections at the very tip of the rachis were still present. This supports the conclusion that the bird is an adult, since first-cy birds do not moult their flight feathers in the post-juvenile moult, which is completed pre-migration in birds studied in China, and juvenile flight feathers would be expected to show more signs of wear as they are made of slightly inferior quality (less dense) material than that of adult feathers (see plates 152 and 153).

Generally, pointed tips to the tail feathers are a feature shown by young birds (passerines), with adults having a more rounded tip. The 2013 paper states that the pointed shape of the feather tips is not a reliable way to distinguish juvenile birds of this species, since this feature was also seen in a large number of known-age adult birds in China. Though most of the tail feathers of the Creachan bird were quite pointed, the tips of the

Plate 153. Red-flanked Bluetail, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 18 October 2020. © *Mark Oksien*

the Creachan bird with those of birds of known-age included in Clement & Rose (p307) and Shirihai & Svensson (p250–252) to better follow the argument on sexing of the bird above].

The wing length of the bird (78mm) falls at the bottom end of the range for males (78–85mm, mean 81.3mm), but is close to the mean (77.9mm) noted for females (range 75–88mm), of known adult birds studied in China (Hellström & Norevik 2013). On balance the less intense colouration of the orange patch and less strong blue tones of the tail/uppertail would appear to indicate that the bird is a female, with the wing length most consistent with this too.

There were 10 other Red-flanked Bluetails reported in Scotland in autumn 2020, found from 3–16 October and all on the Northern Isles, except for one at Duncansby Head, Caithness on 4 October. It seems reasonable to think that the Barra bird was displaced west at much the same time, and reached Scottish airspace at that latitude, probably making first landfall in the Northern Isles before filtering down the west side of the country and being discovered on Barra. That said, it cannot have lingered anywhere for long to feed up, as when trapped on 18 October it had no stored body fat and showed signs of pectoral muscle depletion.

My thanks to Mark Oksien for the use of his photos of the bird in the hand, Bob McMillan for those of the bird in the field, and Paul Baxter for helpful comments.

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Red-flanked Bluetail status in Scotland

*There was a detailed status report included with the finder's account of the first-summer female found on North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 24 May 2019 (*SB *39:3 pp274–277).*

Once the Holy Grail of birding, driving many serious, would-be rarity finder's searches, this species has been found with increasing frequency in the last decade or so, such that it ceased to be considered a BBRC description species from the end of 2016. By this time 185 records had been accepted in Britain, with 71 of these in Scotland. It is now an SBRC description species.

This decision seemed justified given that 12 were found in Scotland alone in 2016, but there were only three in Scotland in 2017, and none in 2018, however numbers have picked up again since with 12 in Scotland again in 2019, and 11 birds were reported in 2020. As stated previously, a massive 94% of Scottish records have occurred in autumn, between the find dates of 19 September and 19 November, and 70% of all Scottish accepted records have been found on the Northern Isles.

The great majority (21/26 = 81%) of birds found since 2016 have again been on the Northern Isles (nine Shetland, six Fair Isle, six Orkney), with two in Caithness (Wick, 19 October 2017 & Duncansby Head, 4 October 2020), and singles in NE Scotland (Rattray, 6 October 2019), the Isle of May (4–6 October 2019) and the Creachan (Barra, Outer Hebrides) bird above. Two of these records (8%) have been in spring, the Orkney bird in May 2019, and one at Burrafirth, Unst, Shetland on 12 April 2019. This is very close to the overall observed seasonal split of just 6% of records being in spring and a massive 94% in autumn.

The Creachan bird is the second to be recorded on the Outer Hebrides, following one (trapped & ringed) at Uigen, Lewis from 31 March to 7 April 2012, and becomes the third longest staying individual in Scotland (10 days) after one at Geosetter, Mainland, Shetland on 3–17 November 2014 (15 days), and one at North Roe, Mainland, Shetland on 5–16 October 2017 (12 days).

Hume's Warbler, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 31 October–3 November 2020 - first west Scotland record

J. BOWLER

In common with the rest of the Hebrides, Tiree saw a record influx of Yellow-browed Warblers in October 2020, with at least 16 individuals tallied, including a group of five birds in our mature, sheltered garden at Balephuil on 3–12 October and a long-staying bright and vocal bird there that remained until 27 October. The island was then hit by a succession of westerly gales and the supply of continental migrants dried up. A brief window of easterly-based winds overnight on 30 October dropped a few new migrants into the garden the next day, including two Goldcrests, two Blackcaps and what I presumed was another Yellow-browed Warbler - conditions on 31 October were poor with a southerly gale and rain.

The presumed Yellow-browed Warbler appeared at 13:40 hrs in our back garden as I was looking through our lounge windows. I first saw it pop up from deep down in some low umbellifer leaves into a *Rosa rugosa* bush, where it fed mostly in the open by gleaning the leaves. The warbler struck me as generally oddly-muted in colour tones for a Yellow-browed Warbler, which I put down at the time to the dull conditions. However, I was sufficiently concerned about its grey-toned appearance that I grabbed my bridge camera and attempted to photograph the bird, as it moved rapidly around the back garden in the gale. Most of my photos missed the bird completely but I managed to grab a decent record-shot as it perched briefly low-down in a sycamore.

I watched the bird for about ten minutes, then headed out into the garden to see it better. Unfortunately, it had gone to ground by the time I reached it from our front door and despite much searching, I did not see the bird again that day and was unable to hear it call. The gales were even stronger the following day, but I spotted the warbler a couple of times in the garden, both times feeding close to the ground in long vegetation and giving little away, other than that the wing-bar on the median coverts was tiny and very inconspicuous. In addition, the bill appeared to be mostly black with just a restricted area of pinkish-grey at the base of the lower mandible, the legs were rather dark with muted yellow tones on the feet and back of the lower tarsi only and there was a distinct lack of yellow tones anywhere on the body. I had my suspicions about the bird, but both tweeted and emailed the photo to others as a "Yellow-browed Warbler". Several people got back to me stating that they thought the birds' muted grey tones looked good for Hume's Warbler, but that hearing the call was critical for the identification.

Monday 2 November was a much calmer and sunnier day and I therefore spent much time searching the garden and its environs for the warbler, including leaving my upstairs office window open to listen for any calls. This drew a blank all day, with the garden instead chock-full at times with hundreds of noisy Icelandic Redwings that had arrived overnight. The Blackcaps and Goldcrests were absent, so I assumed that the warbler had also gone.

At 08:40 hrs on 3 November I entered our back garden to restock the bird feeders and as I did so, I flushed up a small warbler that had been feeding unseen in long grass by the rockery. It was the 'yellow-brow'. Upon flushing, it called many times, initially a distinctive rather low disyllabic '*Seee-wu*' with the emphasis on the first note and a descending pitch towards the end. It called this in flight when flushed and also when perched, gloriously in the open and in good light on a low willow branch. Even in the sunlight, the bird looked distinctly grey-toned and dull for a Yellow-browed Warbler. The single obvious wing-bar was buffy-white rather than yellowish, the supercilium was a

Plate 154. Hume's Warbler, Isle of Tiree, Argyll, 31 October 2020. © *John Bowler*

muted grey-buff, the central crown was dull grey, the entire underparts were washed dirty-grey including the vent, the tertials had rather narrow pale edges and dull tips and even the edgings to the primaries and secondaries were only grey-green rather than the expected bright yellow-green. It was indeed a Hume's Warbler!

The bird showed well for a couple of minutes and then flicked back down into cover, calling the oddly descending '*Seee-wu*' call again as it did so, and a little later on, when out of sight, it also called a louder '*Soo-weet*' several times, with the emphasis more on the second part of the call. Both calls were very different from the typical penetrating high-pitched '*Tssoeest*' call of a Yellow-browed Warbler. With the bird still calling, I headed back into the house to retrieve my camera. However, despite extensive searching, I did not hear or see it again until it popped up briefly in the *Rosa rugosa* bush during our lunch-break at 14:10 hrs. I followed it once more into the garden, but it evaded the camera and after giving a few more '*Soo-weet*' calls from cover, it quickly went back to ground and despite me searching for it several times, I failed to relocate it again. I only ever heard this bird call when, or just after, I flushed it, and it appeared to feed mostly on the ground within tall dense vegetation, so compared to Yellow-browed Warbler, it was a very hard bird to locate and photograph. However, I was very pleased to have finally nailed the identification and for our garden to have added another new species to the Argyll list.

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Hume's Warbler status in Scotland

This Eastern Palearctic species was split from Yellow-browed Warbler by the BOURC in 1998, and comprises two subspecies, with British records believed to relate to the western race P. h. humei *which has a breeding range in upland forests from the Altai Mountains eastwards through Central Asia to NW China and western-most Mongolia to adjacent southern-most Russia. It is entirely migratory and winters from SE Iran, Iraq east through SE Afghanistan, Pakistan and N. India to the Himalayan foothills, Sikkim and Bangladesh, with small numbers along the coasts of the UAE and Oman.*

There have been 170 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2019 with 30 of these in Scotland, since the first at Auchmithie, Angus on 13 October 1991. Twenty of the Scottish records have occurred since 2004, but the species is irregular and less than annual with six blank years in that period, but six recorded in both 2008 and 2011. Almost all of the Scottish records were found between 13 October and 17 November, with just one outside this window - one at Donmouth, Aberdeen (NE Scotland) from 15–30 December 2006. Records in the rest of Britain are less distinctly grouped with one earlier autumn record at Holkham, Norfolk on 6–11 October 2007, and several birds found from mid-November through into the following January and February and one at Kilnsea, Yorkshire on 12–13 May 2009 - presumably another over-wintering bird.

The majority of the Scottish records have been on the Northern Isles with 12 on Shetland and three each on Fair Isle and Orkney, elsewhere there has been one in Highland, six in NE Scotland, one in Angus, two in Fife, one on the Isle of May and one in Lothian. Most of the earlier Scottish records were only present for a day or two, but latterly birds have often stayed for 4–8 days, with the 2006 Donmouth bird seen for 18 days, and one found on Whalsay, Shetland on 15 November 2011 staying for 16 days.

The Tiree bird was one of four reported in Scotland in autumn 2020 - the others all on the Northern Isles, with the first of those found at Walls, Mainland, Shetland on 12 October - a day earlier than the previous window of occurrences.

Plate 155. Hudsonian Godwit (fifth bird from right), Eden Estuary, Fife, 13 December 2020. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Hudsonian Godwit, Guardbridge/ Edenside, Fife, 3 November to 17 December 2020 – second Scottish record

S. PINDER

On the evening of 9 November Tommy Ross posted a message on the Fife Bird News chat WhatsApp "That is an interesting looking Bar-tailed Godwit that Keith Simpson has put up on the Fife Bird Club website. Very black patch on the underwing, similar to Hudsonian. Does anyone have a view on the photo?" What followed was a panicked search for my FBC password and disbelief as the now famous flight shot of a Hudsonian Godwit appeared on my laptop. Nobody knew where the photo was taken, but the Eden Centre seemed the most likely spot, with the River Eden near Guardbridge the most regular area favoured by godwits in Fife. Later on, in the evening Sam Taylor pointed out that the picture was taken on 3 November and uploaded on the 7th. Would the bird still be present on 10th? Possibly, if the Black-tailed Godwit flock was still around then why not? A few WhatsApp exchanges and a few phone calls among the local birders and plans were set.

Next morning, I arrived at the Eden Centre at 07:30 hrs, about 15 minutes before sunrise and met up with John Bell who had been scanning the waders gathering on the rising tide since first light. Over the next hour or so we were joined by Ken Shaw, John Nadin, Dick Byrne and Chris McGuigan. The need for social distancing meant John and I were positioned to the south side of the (closed) hide at the Eden Centre and the others to the north.

The Eden is a constrained pocket estuary bordered by Leuchars (former) RAF base, A-roads and golf courses, but on the morning of the 10th it was atmospheric, with mist and the sound of thousands of Pink-footed Geese, small parties of Whooper Swans, chittering waders and the thin calls of Kingfishers. The light was poor under heavy dull grey skies, and visibility was about 500 m, but still better than the previous day, when haar had reduced the view to less than 50 m at times. Among the geese and waders gathered around the edge of the mudflat, six Black-tailed Godwits were visible, preening and feeding on the exposed mud.

As the tide continued to rise, more Black-tailed Godwits gathered in a group opposite the hide. It wasn't a particularly high tide that day, so the birds weren't driven off by the rising waters. Eventually a total of 42 godwits settled down, roosting and preening with a few still feeding.

At 09:10 hrs large numbers of Pink-footed Geese noisily departed and this flushed the godwit flock which proceeded to fly in a tight circle a couple of times. I managed to pick out the godwit in the flock with the black underwing coverts that we were all looking for. On its second pass I could see that the white wing-bar on the upperwing was both narrow and short. John Bell got on to the bird just before the flock landed back on the shore and settled back down to roost, though no one else had picked up the bird. The flock was thoroughly grilled and one bird was singled out as being very slightly different - the same bird being picked out independently by the two groups of birders either side of the hide. The features were difficult to discern, as most of the godwits were facing away from us with their bills tucked up.

The differences were subtle compared to the Black-tailed Godwits, but this one was very slightly smaller, owing to its slightly shorter tibia. The upperparts were a little browner overall, probably due to the contrasting dark anchor-shaped centres to the mantle and scapulars, but the dull light hid this from us at the time. On the few brief occasions it looked up, or ran short distances, the supercilium was seen to be more distinct than on the Black-

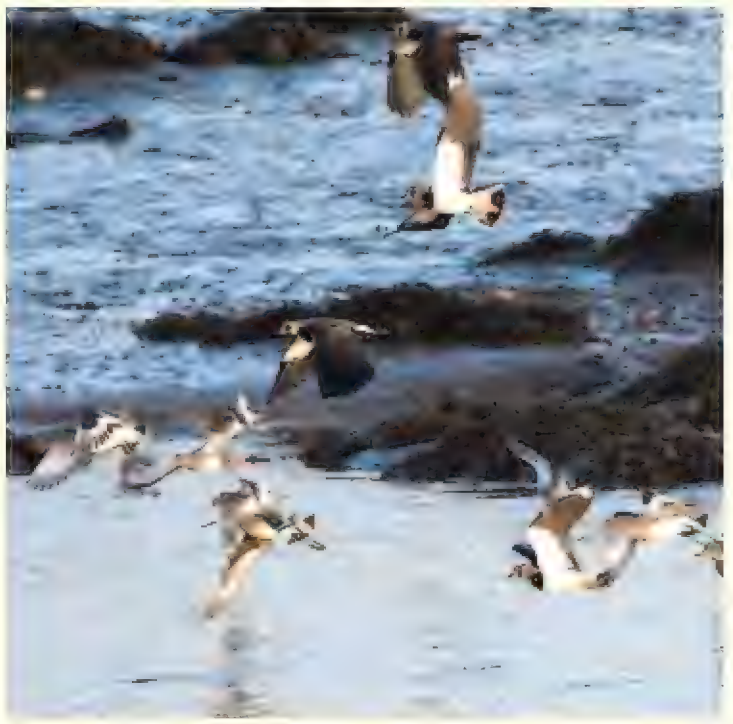

Plate 156. Hudsonian Godwit (front, left of centre), Eden Estuary, Fife, 17 December 2020. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Plate 157. Hudsonian Godwit with Redshank, Guardbridge, Fife, 3 November 2020. © *Keith Simpson*

tailed Godwits, being very white and broad before the eye, and was cleaner and more straight-edged and less lumpy. The bill was a little upcurved, and the breast and belly warm buff. Overall, it gave the impression of a first calendar-year bird. The bill was longer than expected, not much different in length to the Black-tailed Godwits roosting with it. Later during its stay, Jared Wilson doubtlessly correctly opined that this could be an indication that it was a female. In short, it looked like a Black-tailed Godwit at roost and a Bar-tailed when walking about.

As time ticked on, doubts set in and churned in the mind. Did I really see the black underwing? The reduced wing bar? Why did no-one else see it? We (and especially I) needed to see it in flight again to lay those fears to rest. Although I'm an active birder, I'm a relative newcomer to Fife and I was well aware that claiming such a rare bird when it had made only two or three passes in front of a line-up of very experienced and knowledgeable Fife birders without them picking it up must have at the very least been frustrating for those present.

At 10:20 hrs, after a painfully long, nail-biting wait, the flock took off and circled higher and higher. This time all observers saw the diagnostic black underwing coverts. The flock flew to Coble Shore further east down the estuary where it was re-found by Rob Armstrong at 12:00 hrs.

It was all celebrated rather pitifully. An elbow bump with John Bell and some socially-distanced chat with all.

The bird remained faithful to the Eden until it was last seen on 17 December. Roosting upriver, and starting feeding at Guardbridge before heading to the outer estuary proved to be its routine for the earlier part of its stay, with more time spent towards the outer estuary and nearby fields later during its stay. Occasionally, it made forays to feed in flooded fields close to the south and north-west of the estuary. On these feeding trips it was most often observed alone or in loose association with Curlews. During its stay it continued to moult its juvenile feathers, so gaining a plainer winter plumage and making the bird increasingly difficult to pick out at roost. Its current location is unknown, but presumably it is going undetected in a Black-tailed Godwit flock in western-most Europe or sub-Saharan Africa, and may present another chance for a lucky observer next spring as it heads north again.

Simon Pinder, Fife.
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Hudsonian Godwit status in Scotland

This Nearctic species breeds in wet meadows near the treeline in NW Alaska, south Alaska from Anchorage to Cape St Elias, and in Canada from Churchill along the SE shore of Hudson Bay. Post-breeding birds congregate on the shores of Hudson and James Bays prior to migration. It is entirely migratory, and winters in southern Chile, and from Uruguay and southern Brazil to the southern tip of Argentina.

There have been five accepted records (three birds) in Britain to the end of 2019, with just one of these in Scotland:

1981 *Yorkshire, adult, Blacktoft Sands, 10 September to 3 October, Devon, Countess Wear, Exeter, 22 November to 14 January 1982 presumed same as Yorkshire*
1983 *Yorkshire, Blacktoft Sands, 26 April to 6 May, presumed same as above*
1988 *NE Scotland, Slains Pools, Collieston, 26 September*
2015 *Somerset, adult female, Meare Heath, 24 April to 3 May.*

There is one Irish record - an adult male at Inishdawros, Ballyconelly, Co. Galway on 22 July 2015, presumed same at Kilmurvey, Inishmore, Aran Islands on 15–17 September 2015.

British records divide into distinct spring and autumn groupings with find dates from 24–26 April and 10–26 September respectively plus one instance of overwintering with the 1981 bird in Exeter. Unsurprisingly, all sightings have involved birds associating with Black-tailed Godwits, though the Edenside bird was regularly seen in fields on its own or loosely associated with Curlews, rather than on the mudflats with the godwit flock, towards the latter part of its stay.

SCOTTISH BIRD SIGHTINGS

1 January to 31 March 2021

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

After an excellent autumn, winter proved rather quiet, though the White-winged Scoter was again present in Lothian from mid-February, a Spotted Sandpiper overwintered in Ayrshire, and a Woodlark overwintered on North Ronaldsay, Orkney.

'Grey-bellied Brant': a bird showing characteristics of this form was at Munlochy Bay/Culloden (High) from 2020 to 4 April, and two at Nairn (M&N) from 2020 were reported again on 19 February. **Todd's Canada Goose (form *interior*):** two on Tiree (Arg) from 2020 to 8 February, and one still to 18 March, and one at Cornabus, Islay (Arg) from 2020 to 25 February. **Snow Goose:** single white-phase birds were at Balemore/Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) on 1–14 January; at Kyles Paible/Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist on 1–20 February and 1 March; on Sanday (Ork) on 16–18 February and again on 19 March, and at Knockintorran, North Uist on 8 March, a white-morph and a blue-morph bird near Cairnbulg (NES) on 21 March, then at Inverallochy (NES) on 21–22 March and at Lonmay, near Rathen (NES) on 30 March. **Taiga Bean Goose:** the Slammannan flock (Clyde/UF) dwindled to 49 by the end of January; five were on Sanday (Ork) on 22–24 February. **Tundra Bean Goose:** singles were on Fair Isle from 5 January to 20 February; at Gollanfield, near Ardersier (High) on 15 January and 22 February; at Ordie, near Loch Kinnord (NES) on 19 January; near Beauly (High) on 31 January; at Rattray Head (NES) on 4 February; at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) on 13 February, with probable same at Pittenweem (Fife) on 20 February, and near Collessie (Fife) on 6 March; three were on Fair Isle on 5 March, with one lingering into April, and one at Carr Road, near Dulnain Bridge (High) on 11 March. **Bewick's Swan:** an adult was at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) on 9 February. **Egyptian Goose:** one remained at Loch of the Lowes SWT Reserve (P&K) from 2020 to 19 March. **Ruddy Shelduck:** one was still at Martnaham Loch (Ayr) from 2020 to 8 January; one at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 29 January, and one at Drumclog (Clyde) on 18 March, with presumed same at Gilmourton, near Strathaven (Clyde) from 23 March into April.

American Wigeon: single drakes were at Oban Trumisgarry, North Uist (OH) on 14 January; at Loch Bee, South Uist (OH) on 20 February; on Sanday (Ork) on 23 February, and at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) from 27 March into April. **Black Duck:** the regular adult drake at Strontian (High) was noted on 5 January. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 2020 to 12 March; at Tain Links (High) from 2020 into April; at Kinneil Lagoon, near Grangemouth (UF) on 2 January; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 2 January to 27 March; at The Wart, Sanday (Ork) on 2–7 January; at Point of Grimsetter, Mainland (Ork) on 10 January; at Inganess Bay, Mainland (Ork) from 11 January into March; at Loch Fada, Benbecula (OH) on 14 January, then nearby at Coot Loch, Benbecula on 18–26th; at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 19 January; at Loch Eubhal, near Balranald, North Uist on 10 February, three at Ardmhor ferry terminal, Barra (OH) on 4–15 March, with two still on 28th, and one into April; singles at Loch Riaghain, Tiree (Arg) on 4 March; at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) on 6–7th and 26 March; at Loch of Snarravoe, Unst (Shet) on 7–10th; at Loch Hallan, South Uist on 18–31st; four at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 18th, and one at Vidlin, Mainland (Shet) on 23–25 March.

Ring-necked Duck: a drake was still at Martnaham Loch (Ayrs) from 2020 into April; two females were still at Cameron Loch (Fife) to 23 January, with one still to 7 February; a drake was still at Acharacle, Loch Shiel (High) to 1 February; a drake was at Linlithgow Loch (Loth) on 5–7 January; a drake at Loch a' Phuil, Tiree (Arg) on 5 January, joined by two females on 6–25 January, with all three on the island into April; a drake at Kinghorn Loch (Fife) from 9 January to 27 March, with presumed same at Beveridge Park, Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 19 January; the regular drake again in Glasgow (Clyde) at Bingham's Pond/Victoria Park Pond/Mugdock

Reservoir/Kilmardinny Loch/Frankfield Loch/Hogganfield Loch, from 12 January to 30 March; a drake at Loch na Bo, near Lhanbryde (M&N) on 2nd and 13 March, with presumed same nearby at Loch Oire (M&N) on 6–21 March. **King Eider:** a female was at Ham Voe, Foula (Shet) on 1–3 January; the returning drake was still at Burghead Bay (M&N) on 1–5 January, presumed same off Nairn (M&N) on 15 February; a first-winter drake was off Walls, Mainland (Shet) on 22–26 February, and 4–23 March, and a first-winter drake in Hascosay Sound, Yell (Shet) on 2–3 March. **Surf Scoter:** single adult drakes were off Hatston Pier, Kirkwall (Ork) from 2021 to 6 January; off Embo (High) on 5 January; a drake and a female off Musselburgh/Fisherrow/Eastfield (Loth) from 2020 to 24 January, with a drake still to 21 March, and a female on 1st and 7–31 March; a drake off Dornoch (High) on 10–11 January, with two present on 12th, and three on 15th, then a drake on 20 January, and a first-winter drake at Embo from 22 January to 28 February, and four [two adult drakes] on 2–27 March, with one drake still on 28 March; a female was in Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 15–19 January, a drake again off Hatston Pier from 5 March into April, and four drakes were off Ferny Ness (Loth) on 21 March. **White-winged Scoter:** the returning drake was off Musselburgh/Fisherrow (Loth) from 7 Februry into April.

White-billed Diver: one was still at South Nesting Bay, Mainland (Shet) from 4 January into April, with two there on 5th and 19–28 January, and 31 March; singles at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 6 January; at Skeo Taing/Balta, Unst on 19 January; at Lusa Mouth/Pabay Sound, Broadford, Skye (High) on 24th and 26 January to 1 February; off North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 26 January and 20–26 February; two off North Hill, Papa Westray (Ork) on 10 February, and one still to 26 March; off Norwick, Unst on 20 February; two in Bluemull Sound, off Yell/Unst (Shet) on 24 February, and one off Burravoe, Yell (Shet) on 27 February. **Pied-billed Grebe:** the returning adult male was still at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) from 2020 to April 2021. **Spoonbill:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve on 1–7 March, and one at Haugh of Blackgrange (UF) on 31 March. **Eurasian Bittern:** singles were at Carlingwark Loch, Castle Douglas (D&G) on 16 January; at Castle Loch LNR, Lochmabben (D&G) on 17 January, and at Paxton, near Chirnside (Bord) on 19 February. **Cattle Egret:** one was at Martingarth Farm, New Abbey (D&G) on 30 January. **Great White Egret:** singles were at Reston (Bord) on 8 January and 10 February; at Castle Loch, Lochmabben (D&G) on 13–17 January; at Bowmont Water, Kirk Yetholm (Bord) from about 15–19 January; at Westruther, near Hounslow (Bord) on 17 January; at Rossie, Montrose Basin (A&D) from 23 January to 26 February; at Chirnside (Bord) on *c.* 20–25 February; at Corby Loch (NES) from 21 February to 2 March, and two at Castle Loch, Lochmabben on 9 March, with one still to 23 March. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was near Bridge of Craigisla (A&D) on 17 January; one at Dava, near Grantown-on-Spey (High) on 20 January, and near Grantown again on 2 March. **Common Crane:** one flew north past Scoughall (Loth) on 6 March; one over Pathhead, Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 18 March; two over Dowlaw (Bord) on 20 March, and three flew over Torness Point (Loth), then Crail (Fife) and Westhill, Aberdeen (NES) on 21 March.

Pacific Golden Plover: a first-winter was at Findhorn Bay (M&N) from 2020 to 12 January. **American Golden Plover:** one was still at Balgarva/Eochar, South Uist (OH) from 2020 to 21 February, and at Liniclate, Benbecula (OH) on 19 March. **Spotted Sandpiper:** a first-winter was at Croy, near Maidens (Ayrs) from 2020 into April. **Grey Phalarope:** singles were off Cramond Island, Edinburgh (Loth) on 4 January; near Kinloss (M&N) on 8 January; off Dornoch (High) on 10 January; off St Andrews pier (Fife) on 3 February; off Morrison's Haven, Musselburgh (Loth) on 10 February; off Inverbervie (NES) on 10 February; off the Elliot Burn mouth, Arbroath (A&D) on 15 February, with presumed same off Carnoustie (A&D) on 16th, and one off North Wick, Papa Westray (Ork) on 21 February.

Sabine's Gull: one was at Usan Bay (A&D) on 7 February. **Mediterranean Gull:** remains much under-reported away from the Firth of Forth. **Ring-billed Gull:** an adult was again at Strathclyde Loch (Clyde) on 2–15 January; an adult was at Eastfield/Joppa (Loth) on 17–25 January, 7th and 19–25 February, and 5–10 March; presumed same at Bilston (Loth) on 13-14 March and Seton Sands (Loth) on 26 March; an adult at Soleburn, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 18 March. **Glaucous Gull:** just over 100 reported in January, from Shetland to Fife and Ayrshire, mostly singles but with higher counts of 15 on Papa Westray (Ork) on 17th; eight on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 17th, and eight at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on 30th. Over 50 noted in February, from Shetland to Fife and Ayrshire, virtually all singles except for high counts of 10 at Rubha Arnal, North Uist on 6th, with seven still there on 22nd, and eight at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 3rd. In March, about 45 reported, from Shetland to Fife and Dumfries & Galloway, mostly singles, but with higher counts of three at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 1st, and three at Kyles Paible, North Uist on 1st. **Iceland Gull:** about 110 in January, from Shetland to Fife and Clyde, mostly singles but high counts of five at Scrabster (Caith) on 1–21st, six at Thurso (Caith) on 1–3rd, and seven at Rubha Arnal, North Uist (OH) on

30 January. In February, over 90 from Shetland to Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway, mostly ones & twos, but with high counts of five at Scrabster on 5th and 27th, and six there on 19th; eight at Rubha Arnal, North Uist on 6th, and five at the Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 25th. At least 95 reported in March, with the same spread of records, mostly singles but with high counts of five at Scrabster on 7th and 26th, and six there on 18th; four at Rubha Arnal on 10th and 31st; four at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 11th, and four at Basta Voe, Yell (Shet) on 23rd. **Kumlien's Gull:** an adult was at Cransdale, Collieston (NES) on 17 January; an adult at Skelwick Bay, Westray (Ork) on 28 January, and an adult at Backaskaill, Papa Westray (Ork) on 15 February. **American Herring Gull:** a first-winter was at Sandside Bay, Reay (Caith) on 28 January. **Yellow-legged Gull:** a third-winter was in the roost at Balgray Reservoir (Clyde) again from 22 January to 20 February, and an adult at Invergowrie Bay (A&D/P&K) on 15–21 March. **Snowy Owl:** an adult female was still on Hirta, St Kilda (OH) from 2020 to 23 March, and one was at Trona Mires, near Funzie, Fetlar (Shet) on 17 January. **Alpine Swift:** one flew over Fife Ness on 25 March - the first record for Fife.

Great Grey Shrike: singles were still at Backwater Reservoir (A&D) from 2020 to 15 March, and at Teviothead, near Hawick (Bord) on 4 March. **Bohemian Waxwing:** a continued poor showing - about 100 seen in January, with higher counts of 11 at Elgin (M&N) on 2–4th; 18 at Dunfermline (Fife) on 9–10th; 12 at Huntly (NES) on 14th, and 11 in Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 24 January. In February there were three at Boat of Garten, Speyside (High) on 1–5th; seven at Elgin on 13th, three at Nethybridge, Speyside on 17th, with four there from 19 February to 13 March; eight at Elgin on 4 March, four there on 8 March, and nine on 13th; one was at Craighill, Tain (High) on 12 March; one by The Maim, near Ballater (NES) on 20th, and four at Cairn Ryetin, Abernethy Forest RSPB Reserve (High) on 22 March. **Woodlark:** one over-wintered on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 2020 to 16 February. **Shorelark:** one was at John Muir Country Park, Dunbar (Loth) from 23 February to 1 March, with presumed same at Belhaven, Dunbar on 4 March, and possibly same at Scoughall (Loth) on 13 March.

'Siberian' Chiffchaff (*P.c. tristis*): singles were still at Seafield, Edinburgh (Loth) on 1 January; still at Liberton, Edinburgh on 1–8 January; at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 1 January; one at Swinister Burn, Mainland (Shet) on 1 January; two were near Sandwick, Mainland (Shet) on 4 January; one at New Carron (UF) on 23 January; one at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 29 January, with two there on 5 February, and one still to 29 March; one at Brae, Mainland (Shet) on 29 January; one at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 6 February, and one at Eskmouth, Musselburgh (Loth) on 6 March. **'Siberian' Lesser Whitethroat (*S.c. blythi*):** a bird showing characteristics of this form was at Berryden Road, Aberdeen (NES) from 2020 to 29 January. **Firecrest:** one was at Hillend, Mid Yell, Yell (Shet) from 20 February to 30 March.

Rose-coloured Starling: a first-winter was at Eyemouth (Bord) from 31 January to 27 March. **Black Redstart:** singles were at Troon (Ayrs) from 6–17 January; at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 9 January; at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) from 26 January to 9 February; at Eyemouth (Bord) on 8 February; at Wick (Caith) from 18 February to 15 March; at East Beach, Dunbar (Loth) from 25 February to 29 March; on Fair Isle on 5 March, and at Musselburgh (Loth) on 10 March. **Black-bellied Dipper:** one was near Ronas Hil, Mainland (Shet) on 3 January, and an overwintering bird at Voe, Mainland (Shet) was present again from 18 January to 19 March, with two there on 23 January. **Water Pipit:** singles were at Lundin Links (Fife) on 23 January; at Croy Shore, near Balchriston (Ayrs) from 12 February to 5 March; at East Beach, North Berwick (Loth) from 15 February to 14 March, and at Scoughall (Loth) on 14–24 March.

Lapland Bunting: about 40 in January, with highest counts from the overwintering flock in East Fife, with 23 at Hillhead Farm, Boarhills on 9 January, and about 11 at Randerston Farm, Kingsbarns on 3 January, otherwise noted on Skye, South & North Uist (OH) and Orkney. About 30 in February, from Shetland to Lothian and the Outer Hebrides, with high counts of 15 at Musselburgh (Loth) on 14th, and nine at Boarhills on 13th. In March, there were two at Loch Portree, Skye (High) on 14th, and singles at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 22nd; on North Ronaldsay on 24–25th; on Fair Isle on 25–26th, and at Ardivachar Point, South Uist (OH) on 27 March. **Snow Bunting:** good numbers were reported, with over 460 in January, mostly on the north mainland, but also from Shetland to Lothian and Argyll, with higher counts in January of 50 at Balranald RSPB Reserve, North Uist (OH) on 4th; 120 at Lossiemouth Airfield (M&N) on 6th; 25 on North Ronaldsay on 5th, and 26 at Dornoch (High) on 19 January. In February about 550 birds, from the Northern Isles to Borders and Argyll, but mostly in the north, with peak counts of 100 at Cromarty (High) on 11th;125 at the Lossie Estuary (M&N) on 16th, and 40 at Paiblesgarry, North Uist (OH) on 22nd. About 190 in March, from the Northern Isles to Borders and the Outer Hebrides, with peak counts of 60 at Balranald RSPB Reserve on 15th; 31 at Lossiemouth Airfield on 15th, and 14 at Dornoch (High) on 26th.

Advice to contributors

There is a basic division in *Scottish Birds* between papers and short notes that are peer-reviewed followed by the Club and Birding sections which are not. These splits in content are highlighted by fonts used and paper colour.

The first part accepts manuscripts on the status, distribution and populations of birds in Scotland and, particularly, changes in these over time. Write-ups of census work find a natural home in this section, as do the culmination of research topics and updates to information in *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007). Original work and observations are encouraged, but summary papers will be considered and key-note papers of a more general nature may occasionally be commissioned. Papers should be fully referenced as in any scientific work. House style should be followed and guidance is available on the SOC website. Articles of less than 700 words are generally considered as short notes, but are otherwise in a similar format.

Authors should bear in mind that only a small proportion of the *Scottish Birds* readership are scientists and should aim to present their material concisely, interestingly and clearly. Unfamiliar technical terms and symbols should be avoided wherever possible and, if deemed essential, should be explained. Supporting statistics should be kept to a minimum. All papers and short notes are accepted on the understanding that they have not been offered for publication elsewhere and that they will be subject to editing. Papers will be acknowledged on receipt and are normally reviewed by at least two members of the editorial panel and, in most cases, also by an independent referee. They will normally be published in order of acceptance of fully revised manuscripts.

The latter two sections of *Scottish Birds* welcome informal as well as more serious contributions about any aspect of birds and their habitats in Scotland. It is not peer-reviewed, has minimal editing, and contributions can be descriptive, anecdotal, controversial, humorous or quirky. They can report on surveys, express opinions, describe birds and places, look back into history, speculate as to the future and can represent organisations or be the work of private individuals. The documentation of rare and scarce birds in Scotland, plus a wide range of identification, site and species related information is lavishly illustrated by high quality colour photographs. We welcome photographs, maps, cartoons, and will accept basic graphs and tables when relevant. Meeting reports or field trip accounts are all welcome, but our main aim is to focus on Scottish birds in Scotland or abroad. We will occasionally include articles from other parts of the world and sometimes about other wildlife.

In terms of length, we accept anything from short notes up to articles of *c.* 2,000 words. There are no strict guidelines as to format, but we would encourage contributors to follow the house style (see SOC website for guidance, as detailed above). Within this section, we also publish obituaries of Club members and others who have contributed to Scottish ornithology. These are organised through Waterston House, where the Club Administrator will liaise with contributors. Book reviews are organised through the Club Librarian.

Please submit articles! We very much wish to encourage unsolicited contributions to this part of *Scottish Birds*. The editors spend much time requesting articles - a task that would be far less onerous if they are submitted freely from members and other readers. We wish to make it as easy as possible for contributors to send us material that reflects the enormous range of news, work and opinion relevant to Scotland's birds.

Text, image and graphics formats

Contributions should preferably be submitted in electronic format via email. Only short articles and letters can be accepted in printed or hand written form. No fees are paid. Tables, maps and diagrams should be designed to fit either a single column or the full page width. Table and photograph captions should be self-explanatory and should be able to stand alone from the text. Please include all captions after the text. For photographs please supply the locality and month/year taken (if known), together with the name of the photographer.

Maps should preferably be provided in pdf format, or as a high-resolution jpg/tiff file. Maps may be redrawn to maintain house style, in which case the data used in their compilation may be requested. Charts should be provided with their accompanying data within a stand-alone spreadsheet so that house style can be applied. Photographs should be supplied as direct copies of the original (un-altered and un-cropped) camera files.

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Please send all correspondence to: SOC Club Administrator at Waterston House, Aberlady EH32 0PY or by email. Telephone: 01875 871330 or email for further advice and assistance.

PhotoSP©T Plate 158. I'm fortunate to live close to Linlithgow Loch, which has been my most visited location for lockdown exercise. My visit on Monday 15 February 2021 was during a very dull, grey morning but I still headed out, more in hope than expectation. Around the halfway point of my walk, I came across two Grey Herons engaged in some sort of struggle on the path in front of me. This wasn't behaviour I'd seen before, so I kept my distance to observe and photograph what appeared to be a very serious dispute between a dominant adult and a first-winter bird.

The adult appeared to gain advantage by standing on the other bird and flapping its wings to help keep it down. While the young bird was held down, it would raise its head, neck and bill toward the adult, either as a sign of resistance or perhaps, submission? The latter seemed unlikely, as it only led to the adult striking downwards to grapple with it, bill to bill, or push the youngster's head down with its neck. The adult only seemed satisfied when the young bird was entirely prostrate, with its head and neck lying flat on the ground.

I'm not sure how this encounter would have naturally concluded, since a walker arrived from the opposite direction, causing the adult to fly off, leaving the young bird to struggle to its feet and shuffle off under a nearby bush.

The loch had been frozen for over a week, so feeding opportunities for the herons had been severely restricted. I suspect the birds came into conflict over access to the adjacent burn entry to the loch.

Equipment used: Nikon Coolpix B700, 800 mm, Program, ISO 160, 1/1250 sec, f5.6.

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